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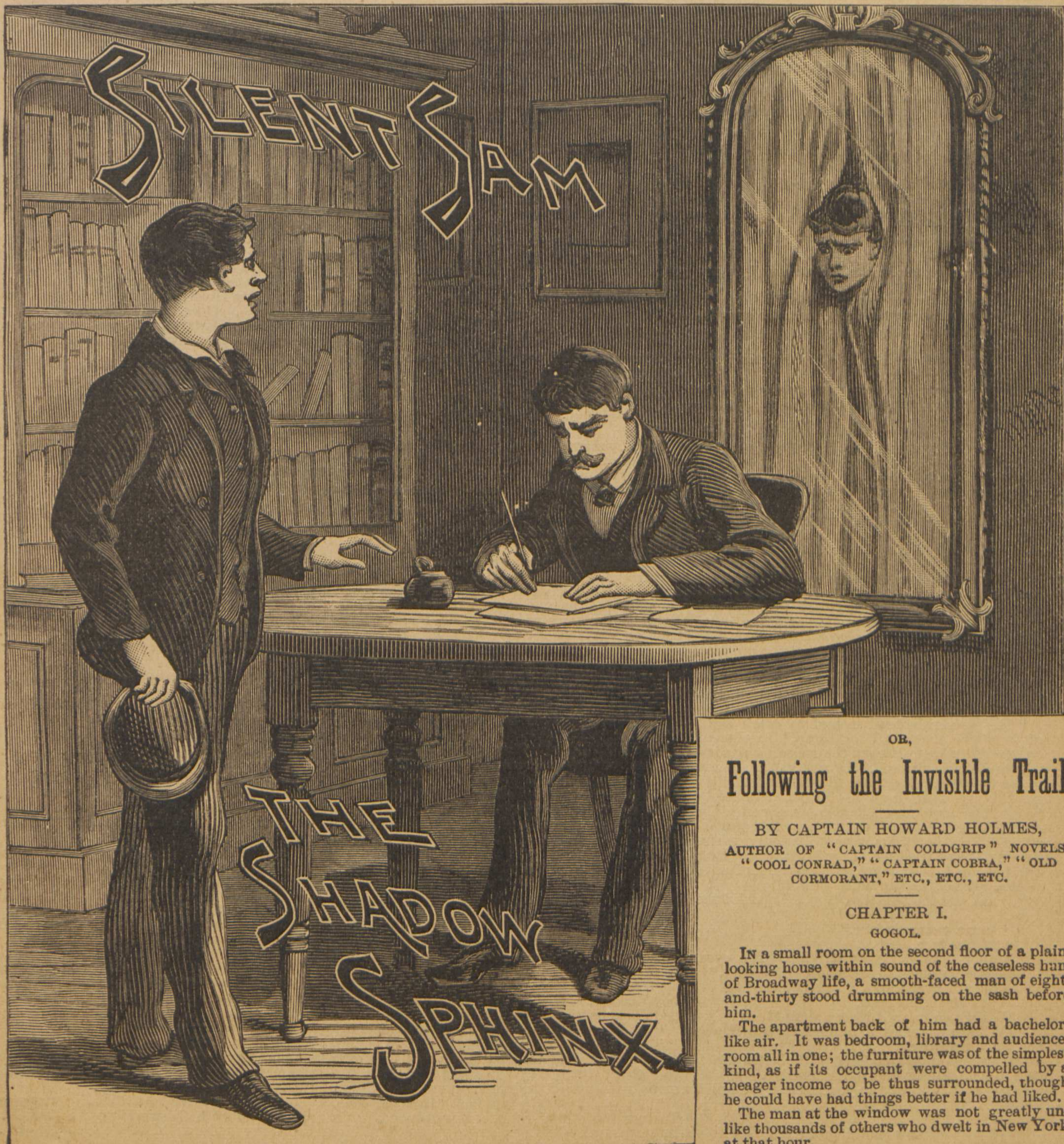
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FOR HALF A SECOND THE REFLECTED APPARITION HELD ME SPELLBOUND.

OR, Following the Invisible Trail.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"COOL CONRAD," "CAPTAIN COBRA," "OLD
CORMORANT," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. GOGOL.

In a small room on the second floor of a plain-looking house within sound of the ceaseless hum of Broadway life, a smooth-faced man of eight-and-thirty stood drumming on the sash before him.

The apartment back of him had a bachelor-like air. It was bedroom, library and audience-room all in one; the furniture was of the simplest kind, as if its occupant were compelled by a meager income to be thus surrounded, though he could have had things better if he had liked.

The man at the window was not greatly unlike thousands of others who dwelt in New York at that hour.

There was nothing especially attractive about

his face, though it was well-shaped and not unhandsome. It was plain that he kept it well shaved, for it was, at the opening of our story, almost as smooth as a child's. A pair of observing eyes of a dark brown looked out over his rather dark cheeks; they seemed to see everything in the street beneath, despite the shadows of dusk.

"It's a little past the time now," murmured the solitary man, ceasing his tapping on the sash as he concluded. "I'll wait five minutes yet and then if— Ah! here he comes!"

Sounds as if one ascending the stairs saluted the man's ears and he turned about and watched with much curiosity a door across the room.

In a little while the opening of the door brought the man face to face with another person.

"A little late, Gogol, my boy," he smiled.

"I couldn't help it, sir."

"Never mind it; no harm done. I would have waited awhile longer anyhow."

The new-comer, a boy of perhaps seventeen, came forward unbuttoning his close coat and watching the man with a singular smile at the corners of his mouth.

"You've brought me something, Gogol?" And the speaker put forth his hand as the youth buried one of his own for a moment in his bosom.

That hand coming forth again, produced a letter which the man took and carried to a table above which he lighted the gas and then drew up a chair.

The boy gazed at him a short time and then went to the window, where he halted and began to look down into the street.

"Gogol?"

At sound of the voice the boy turned and joined at the table the man who held between thumb and finger the letter which he had just read.

"What is it, captain?"

"Did he send any word outside of this?" asked the man.

"Not a word."

In spite of himself, the boy's gaze wandered to the letter.

"Did he write it in your presence?"

"I was in the room."

"In the library, Gogol?"

"Yes, captain."

"The only person with him?"

The boy smiled.

"We were alone in the main room," he answered.

"But somebody saw you, eh, boy?"

"By Jupiter, somebody did!" was the answering exclamation.

"Tell me."

The man had leaned back in his chair and was gazing up into the boy's face.

"You recollect the mirror at one side of the room and behind a person who sits at the writing-table?"

The attentive listener nodded slightly; it was hardly anything more than a dropping of the eyelashes.

"Well, I happened to be facing the mirror while he wrote," the boy went on. "The table was between us. As I did not care about watching him all the time, I raised my eyes and they naturally fell upon the looking-glass. All at once I saw reflected there a face besides my own. I knew that the owner of the face was behind me where the heavy velvet arras is. I could see that the folds, or the two parts of it, had been parted to let the face through, and that they had been drawn beneath the chin, thus completely hiding the body to the floor."

The narrator paused as if expecting a question or a comment of some sort from the person at the table, but there was nothing; the eyes that regarded him telling him mutely to proceed.

"The eyes in the head seemed to catch sight of mine the moment I looked up," Gogol went on, "and for half a second the reflected apparition held me spellbound. I knew that the owner of the face was behind me; the thought thrilled me through and through. I turned suddenly toward the arras which, you know, conceals the entrance to the parlor, but the face had vanished, and the velvet folds were still shaking where they had come together. I don't know how long the face had been there, but the events I have related did not take up much time."

"What was the face like, Gogol?" queried the man.

"It was a woman's face."

"A pretty face, eh?"

"Rather dark, but very striking. The eyes, I remember, seemed to glisten like diamonds."

"Have you ever seen the face before?"

The boy shook his head.

"Would you know it if seen again?"

"I'd know it among a million, captain!" was the quick response.

The man's gaze wandered to the letter which he had held during the boy's narrative.

"Don't let it fade from your memory, Gogol," he urged.

"I will not."

"The major knows nothing of this?"

"Nothing."

"That will do, Gogol."

Thus dismissed, the boy returned to his place at the window.

He heard a drawer open and shut, but did not turn his head.

If he had looked he would have seen the man bending over the table with a sheet of white drawing-paper before him and a pencil in his hand.

For twenty minutes there was not a sound of any kind in that little room.

Then the man, without raising his head, pronounced the boy's strange name.

Promptly the lad turned and went forward.

"Look at this," said the man, pointing at the drawing he had made. "Do you see any resemblance?"

The boy bent forward and gazed astonished on the picture on the table. It was a face looking at him from among the folds of a curtain, a face so exquisitely drawn even to the smallest particulars, that it looked like the features of a living person.

"Heavens! it is perfection!" exclaimed the boy. "Your pencil has photographed the face I saw in Major Mascot's house. You must have seen it at some time!"

The answer was a smile as the man said:

"Do you think so, Gogol?" And the boy answering, "I do," let his gaze wander back to the picture.

"As you've said, it is a striking face," continued the man. "I thought I could reproduce it so you would recognize it on sight. I can't give the eyes their full expression on paper; you recognize the face, and that's praise enough."

"I never saw you draw before Captain Sam?" cried the boy astonished.

"Perhaps not."

Gogol drew off, transferring his look from the picture to the artist.

"Is there any thing you can't do?" he queried.

"A thousand things, Gogol, my boy," was the reply.

"You can follow a trail which is not visible to other man-hunters. You're on one of that sort now."

"That's what I am," smiled the man.

"I don't seek to know your secrets, captain. You have been a friend to me—the best and only one I ever had. I am ready to carry out your every command—to lay down my life at your beck, if necessary."

"I won't require that, Gogol."

"Use me as you wish. If I fail you in one particular cast me off and hate me. I haven't forgotten the rescue in the harbor. I would be under the waves now if it had not been for your quick eye and strong arm. The League had me in its grip."

"The League, indeed!" replied the man. "The League has other people in that same merciless clutch."

"I know it!"

"Gogol, you are still a marked person."

"Marked by the League, eh?"

"Yes."

The boy seemed to start slightly, and his lips were seen to meet with firmness before he spoke again.

"You are on the trail, Captain Sam," he said.

"One against a dozen."

"But that one is a match for the Centipedes."

"Don't over-rate your friend, Gogol."

"I don't. I know the Shadow Sphinx." The speaker's hand dropped lightly upon the man's shoulder and the eyes of the pair met in the gaslight. "I'm alone in the world, for, if I have kith or kin it is far across the sea, under the banner of the Russian Bear. I sometimes think, Captain Sam—"

Gogol broke his own sentence and his eyes dropped.

"What do you think sometimes, Gogol?"

"I'm ashamed to tell you," answered the boy.

Silent Sam, the Shadow Sphinx—the detective who kept his own secrets and never left a trail until he had reached the end of it—drew Gogol close to him and gazed steadily into his fine blue eyes for several seconds.

"There's nothing shameful about your life, my boy," spoke the other, in reassuring tones.

In an instant the eyes of Gogol brightened.

"I can tell you this much for I know it," continued the detective. "One of these days all will be made clear."

"And my mother—"

"There! let us go to work," cheerfully interrupted Captain Sam, and drawing Gogol's face downward until he could imprint a kiss on the forehead, he released the boy and left his chair.

"The face in the curtain is another link, my boy," he went on. "It tells me that the Centipede League is still at work."

"And that Major Mascot is in the shadow?"

"Aha! do you think so?" laughed Sam.

"Why was he watched by those black eyes to-night? If not, why did I see the face in the arras by means of the looking-glass?"

"Let me solve the puzzle. Give me time. There was never a League like this one. It is infamous, merciless."

"Then, beware, Captain Sam!"

The detective gave the boy a look and a laugh,

and donning an overcoat, for the air without was chilly, he hurried away, leaving Gogol alone to breathe with upturned face an audible prayer for his protection.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN HOLOFERNES.

A FINE rain falling for some time had darkened the stones of New York, and those who were abroad without umbrellas had buttoned their overcoats to the chin and were making the best of their tramp.

"Is it raining yet, Draco?" asked a man who occupied a handsome sofa in an elegant parlor whose every dab of furniture was revealed by the brilliant light of a swinging globe.

"Yes, master."

"The same steady drizzle that searches out one's bones and chills him?"

"The same."

The man called "master" put his hand out and helped himself to a cigar from a box which occupied an oval table near the sofa.

The servant looked at him a moment and withdrew.

"The rain won't keep Judith and Ivan back," said the person left alone. "Nothing daunts them." And he sent a cloud of white smoke through his mustache toward the lofty ceiling.

Captain Holofernes, as he was called, was one of the handsomest men of the metropolis. In looks and figure he had not a single blemish, if it could not be said that his eyes were a little too piercing, though he had a wonderful control over those black orbs, softening them at will, and causing them to look as gentle and harmless as a maid's.

He was a man of the world—a city nabob with plenty of wealth at his command. The elegant house he occupied outshone its neighbors, and he lived alone beyond the attendance of the servant called Draco, a wiry Greek ten years the senior of Captain Holofernes, whose age was forty-two.

The captain himself looked like a handsome Cuban planter. His Spanish was perfect, his hands soft as silk, and his movements noiseless and cat-like.

When he went to the clubs, which was not very often, he always played a good hand and wagered heavily. When he lost he had a smile for the departing stakes, and when fortune favored him he seemed to take pleasure in keeping his triumph in check.

For a quarter of an hour after Draco's departure Captain Holofernes smoked his cigar with a quiet gusto. Once or twice he showed his splendid teeth in a happy smile, as if pleased, and it was evident that the world was moving to his liking.

At last he left the sofa, threw the half-smoked cigar into a gilded cuspidor, and jerked a green cord that dangled over the table.

His hand had hardly left the cord when Draco presented himself.

"No one yet, Draco?" asked Captain Holofernes.

"No one," answered the Greek.

"Does it rain as before?"

"Yes."

Draco was awaiting orders, stiffly posing near the door, with his eyes riveted on his master, when the noise of wheels saluted the ears of both.

"Judith!—at last!" exclaimed Captain Holofernes. "Admit her, Draco," and he smiled to himself as the man retired.

He went to the larger table that stood in the exact center of the room, stopped there and faced the door—intense eagerness on his swarthy face.

In a minute Draco appeared alone.

"I thought—"

The sudden spring executed by the Greek cut off Captain Holofernes's sentence and Draco, clutching his wrist and transfixing him by a look, said:

"It is not Judith, master."

"In God's name who, then?"

"I think it is the man from Moscow."

Captain Holofernes changed color.

"That man here and at this time?" he exclaimed.

"I think so."

"Admit him."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Draco's eyes, and knowing nothing but obedience he vanished through the doorway.

"The last man I looked for," muttered Holofernes; "but it is my duty to meet whoever comes. I guess I am not powerless."

At the same time he took from a drawer a handsome revolver which he thrust into his left side-pocket, allowing his hand to remain with it, then dropping into the arm-chair from which he hid his writing, he scanned the open door with a pair of fierce eyes.

In another moment Draco ushered into his presence the caller whom he had designated "The Man from Moscow."

It would not have been difficult for any one at all familiar with the world to tell that Captain Holofernes's visitor had at one time come from the czar's empire.

His nationality was stamped in every linea-

ment and showed itself everywhere about his magnificent figure.

His frame was massive, giant-like. A fine beard, surmounted by a dark mustache, covered the lower part of his face; his eye was clear and eagle-like, and the moment it spied Captain Holofernes, it seemed to gleam with triumph.

Draco came no further than the door, and his withdrawal had left the two men alone.

"Good-night, captain," began the Russian.

"You have things nice here," was the answer.

"I have them to my liking," was the answer.

"You can afford it, eh? I hear so."

Holofernes made no reply, but looked searchingly at his caller, who was taking in the rich appointments of the room.

"An impostor, for a thousand!" he mentally exclaimed. "I don't wonder that he deceived Draco. The resemblance is nearly perfect; but my light brings out the difference."

"It's been a long time since we met," said the Russian, coming suddenly back to Captain Holofernes.

"How long?" queried the nabob.

"Five years and six months, to the hour."

Holofernes started.

"You are very exact," he replied, with a sarcastic sneer.

"My memory is excellent—nothing more," smiled the Russian.

At that moment the captain heard a step in the hall, and with it the rustle of a garment.

"Judith!" he thought. "Now I am more than a match for this shadow from the North."

"I need not mention my name," resumed the Russian.

"You need not speak it, though it is not known here."

The visitor laughed.

"You haven't forgotten Colonel Orloff?" he said.

"Come, don't attempt to hoodwink me!" exclaimed Holofernes, his hand at the same time tightening about the butt of the revolver in his pocket.

"You are no more Colonel Feodor Orloff than I am the Czar of Russia."

The two men were looking straight at one another during the nabob's speech.

"Not Orloff?" cried the big Muscovite. "By Jove! that's pretty bold. Who am I, then?"

"A dead man's counterpart! an impostor! a bold rascal, who should have gone to the mines years ago."

Holofernes heard the teeth of the Russian meet and crack at this answer.

"It is a base lie!" exclaimed the so-called Orloff. "A dead man's double, eh? Look at me."

He removed his hat and, with a sudden upward sweep of his hand, pushed back his hair and exposed a great scar that extended across the top of his forehead.

"Scars can be counterfeited as well as names," grinned the captain. "You come to the wrong place to play your game. Don't call yourself Colonel Orloff, the Man from Moscow. You are an entirely different person."

The Russian's hand dropped, and he bent toward Captain Holofernes, whose finger at that moment touched the trigger in his pocket.

"Look here!" he fairly hissed. "I find you rolling in wealth, with a part of the same old band around you. I haven't come straight from the dock to your parlors. I've been in America longer than you think. I've had my eyes and ears open all the time. You've got a fine game on your hands now—a deep game, with some good players besides yourself. Ah! you see I know something, and yet I am not Feodor Orloff. Laugh at me again, Captain Holofernes! You look like your old self when you smile. I find you in a palace—I who have seen you in a prison."

Holofernes's face was ghastly. His hidden hand gripping the six-shooter, came half-way out of the pocket, when a woman glided into the room.

She was tall and exquisitely formed, but a fierceness to her beauty for the moment held even Captain Holofernes spellbound.

The Russian Hercules did not see this woman; his back, at the moment of her entrance, being turned toward the door.

She held in one hand a string, from which dangled an object not unlike our "thousand-legged worm."

It moved, twisted and cavorted in the lamp-light, as she crept toward the Muscovite.

Holofernes turned his attention to his guest. He seemed to know that if the Russian discovered the woman there would be a scene he did not want.

"You are lavish with your accusations!" he laughed.

"I have some in reserve!" was the quick response.

The Russian's hands rested on the table and he was leaning across the board, sending the whole fierce light of his eyes straight into Captain Holofernes's face.

In another moment the woman was directly behind him.

Her right hand came up with the writhing insect beneath it.

She lifted the hideous thing over the Russian's back, and all at once dropped it down his neck,

relinquishing the string the moment the deed was accomplished.

The Russian sprang erect with a terrible cry.

He seemed to feel the teeth of the deadly reptile in his flesh, sending through his body a thousand painful harbingers of death; and, while he writhed he heard the laugh of Holofernes, and saw the beautiful handler of the centipede.

"Don't touch the Russian dog!" cried the woman, as she covered the giant with her finger.

"He has crossed the seas to die by the centipede!" And stepping back, she looked at the tortured man, whose cries of agony suddenly ceased as he fell to the floor and turned his distorted face toward the ceiling.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW SPHINX'S TRAIL.

SAM SINTON, the Shadow Sphinx, had been engaged on a deep mystery for two months prior to his introduction to the reader.

The man was "a born detective," as the common saying goes. He had received the nickname of "Silent" Sam from his manner of work and his silence as to his plans. He never gave any of these away, and those who watched him constantly with a jealous eye—detectives like himself—found themselves baffled at every turn.

The Shadow Sphinx had been among the first to hear of the finding of a corpse floating in the water among the East River docks.

There was nothing startling in this discovery made by a party of wharf rats out on a lark, for each day in its flight over the spires of New York brings to light some mystery of the river, and hundreds of these never claim more than a passing notice from the police.

Sinton's accidental encounter with the floater occurred at a time when he had nothing particular on his hands, and his love for his profession never let a mystery slip through his fingers without more than a mere glance at it.

When the Shadow Sphinx gazed down at the dead man as he lay in the coroner's office he started.

Two days before he had seen and admired the man in the warm afternoon sunshine that flooded the Battery. He recalled how anxiously he had looked down the bay as if expecting a certain vessel, and how he nervously chewed the end of his cigar as that vessel, or a boat from it, did not come from the South.

Nobody knew the dead man.

There was nothing on his person—no papers, no letters—that offered a solution of the human puzzle.

At one side of the neck there appeared a strange blotch which showed that the spot had been swollen at one time.

Silent Sam stooped and looked closely at this place.

"He touched the pier-logs in his drifting," said the doctor.

"It looks like a bite," said a voice at the detective's elbow.

Sinton looked up and saw a man whose looks and garb proclaimed him a common sailor, but one possessing more than average intelligence.

"A bite, did you say?" queried the doctor with an incredulous smile.

"That's just what I said," answered the sailor with emphasis.

"What sort of a bite?"

"Centipede!"

The doctor and several others laughed derisively, but the sailor persisted in his opinion by his looks.

"I've seen hundreds of them," he went on.

"I've spent ten years of my life where they live. I ought to know a centipede's bite from what you doctors call an abrasion."

He spoke the last word in a manner that clearly nettled the young surgeon.

"Look here!" he raised his left sleeve and thrust his arm toward the little group.

There was a singular hollow in the flesh midway between wrist and elbow.

"I chipped my arm once to save my life," he went on. "A centipede touched me there. Say I don't know what its bite is! I tell you, gentlemen, that one got in his work on the subject you've fished from the waters." And the next moment he walked away and left the doctor to his own opinion, which was, to a great extent, that of the crowd.

Sam Sinton caught up with the sailor before he was half a square from the scene of the inquest.

"Ho! what do you think?" exclaimed the tar, recognizing the detective at once.

The detective answered adroitly that doctors were sometimes mistaken, whereat the sailor nodded and smiled.

"When it comes to centipede bites I'll put my opinion against that of any city sawbones," the seaman declared, and, a minute afterward, the Shadow Sphinx was at the threshold of a mystery which he secretly promised himself to solve, if human ingenuity was of any avail.

The sailor's talk and what he had seen himself, convinced him that the coroner's verdict would not be in accordance with the facts, and when he read over that official's signature, that the unknown man had probably fallen into the

water while intoxicated and been drowned, he threw the paper upon the table and laughed.

A week passed before he picked up a single link. Then he learned that the victim was probably a man named Pagin, which information came to him unexpectedly and in a strange manner.

For several nights he had discovered a boy hovering in the vicinity of his room, and at last meeting him among the shadows of the stairway, he collared him and took him up to the light.

There the youth confessed that his name was Gogol, that he had crossed the sea six months before with a man—a Russian suspect called Pagin—whom he had not seen for three or four days.

The boy who was shrewd had discovered Silent Sam's business, and had haunted his quarters in hopes of getting him to hunt for his lost protector.

"Captain Pagin has secret enemies," said Gogol. "He has told me that a League exists in this city. Both of us have been shadowed, and only last night I sprang from the grip of a man within a square of my lodgings."

From that moment the detective took an interest in Gogol.

He was a Russian boy, but he said that Captain Pagin was not his father.

"I didn't like the czar myself," admitted Gogol, during his narrative, "and so when Captain Pagin fled, and I had nothing to bind me to Russia, I accompanied him."

The pair had been watched from the moment of their landing in New York. Gogol said that the League had marked them, that it had finished the captain and would finish him if his new friend, the detective, did not interpose his powerful hand.

During the two months that followed the opening of Sam Sinton's hunt, he had made several further discoveries.

For certain reasons, which will develop themselves further along, here newed his acquaintance with one Major Mascot, a gentleman who lived in elegance among the very wealthy.

This man had traveled everywhere, especially among the tropics—the home of the centipede. He had been bitten himself and could confirm much of what the sailor had told Silent Sam.

He took an interest in the Centipede Mystery, but he did not know that Gogol and Captain Pagin had been friends.

One night Sam Sinton, crossing the river by the ferry, heard the startling cry of a human being as the body struck the water.

He turned and found Gogol, who was with him, missing.

"Help! help!" came from the leaping, dashing water, in the wake of the boat.

The next instant the figure of the Shadow Sphinx leaped toward the spot from which the cries had come. The boat stopped as soon as it could, but Silent Sam was missing.

In a little while, however, he was seen and drawn on board.

In his arms he held the unconscious and half-drowned lad. It was Gogol.

The boy did not recover until the ferry had been reached, and then he told Sam that he had been pushed overboard by a man.

This same man had followed him like an evil shadow; had watched him day and night; had even caught him once before, but he had broken away; and, finally, had pushed him into the boiling waters at the stern of the boat.

"He is one of the League, Captain Sam," said the boy. "I am wanted out of the road. Why? God knows. The centipede stung Captain Pagin. It will sting me one of these days," and Gogol, with a shudder, crept close to the Shadow Sphinx, and, looking up into his face, made a mute and irresistible appeal for protection.

"Not if I can strangle the League, Gogol, my boy!" was the answer. "And I have sworn to strangle it or die in the attempt."

Silent Sam keeping his professional secrets as he did, Gogol found himself often "in the dark."

He did not know what the detective was doing. He could not tell whether he had discovered the haunts of the Centipede League, as they had come to call it, or whether he was still looking for the first clew.

He knew, however, that he (Gogol) had the *entree* to Major Mascot's house; that the handsome and much-traveled man often sent sealed notes to Silent Sam by him; that he sometimes caught the major looking seriously at him, studying him when he seemed half asleep; and other things that made him wonder.

As often as he had been to Major Mascot's house he had never seen before the face which the looking-glass had revealed—the face among the folds of the heavy curtain.

He knew that it was not the face of the young woman called Nelly, who was supposed to be the major's *protegee*, and who inhabited a part of the house into which he (Gogol) never went. He had seen Nelly twice on the stairs—a slender, black-eyed beauty of nineteen, not at all like Major Mascot. She had bowed to and smiled on him, but their acquaintance had never passed beyond this point, though once Gogol found the

girl looking wistfully if not pityingly after him as he went to Major Mascot's room.

The boy felt that Silent Sam knew something about the owner of the face reflected in the glass, for he had drawn it to perfection from memory and without the shadow of the living copy before him.

Somewhere since the commencement of his hunt against the League, Gogol thought, his friend and preserver had struck the strange creature's trail.

Had she been haunting Major Mascot's house? Was there a spy under his roof without Nelly's knowledge? Or, did the girl know of it and yet fear to break the startling truth to her benefactor?

Whenever Gogol thought of these things he connected the beautiful and devilish face among the curtains with the Centipede League. He could not help it.

If he could have seen the woman who stole upon the Russian Hercules in Captain Holofernes's library, he would have given utterance to a wild cry of recognition.

The two faces were the same—the one behind Major Mascot and that which gazed down into the so-called Orloff's face in triumph.

"If I am watched by eyes like hers, heaven help me!" exclaimed Gogol, summing up his reflections after Silent Sam's departure at the end of our first chapter.

The boy went to the window and for a time looked down into the street.

After awhile he threw himself upon the detective's cot, and fell asleep.

The city clocks about him struck the passing hours. He did not hear Silent Sam come back and steal to his side.

The Shadow Sphinx gazed down upon the boy a few moments and then, stooping with a woman's tenderness, he touched his lips to the restful forehead.

"Poor Gogol!" murmured the detective. "In the shadow of the death reptile!" and, watching the boy still, he quietly withdrew.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CENTIPEDE'S CRAWL.

THE Shadow Sphinx left Gogol to his slumbers, but locked the door as he passed from the room.

Solicitude for the boy's safety seemed to have brought him back, for when he reached the street he glanced up at the window of his quarters and watched them anxiously a little time.

When Silent Sam started off he walked rapidly down the drizzling street and soon disappeared.

Not long afterward a figure like his came into view in another part of the city. It was seen for a moment as it crossed a light spot and then vanished among the shadows of some houses that lined one side of an alley-like street.

"Ah! You?" said a voice when a door opened revealing to the detective the parchment-colored face of a tall woman whose eyes seemed to possess an unnatural light.

"It is no one else, Madame Gorgon," answered Sam, slipping into the house, and as the key clicked in the latch, he turned upon the woman now fully revealed by her own light.

She looked what she was—a witch, a woman who made dupes of the credulous, a creature who dealt in the mysterious; in short, a queen of the Black Art as it is practiced to-day—Madame Gorgon.

Whenever she grinned her lips, parting, would reveal two rows of discolored teeth which did not enhance her looks.

"How's the boy?" queried Madame Gorgon.

"I left him asleep."

"Locked up?"

"Yes."

"And the major?"

"I haven't seen him for some days."

For a moment the woman seemed to have reached the end of her string.

"I've looked into the caldron since you were here," she went on at length.

Silent Sam said nothing.

"I saw another part of a life there," was the continuation.

"Whose life?"

"Captain Holofernes's."

"Ah! was he here?"

"He was not."

"Did his agent come?"

"No. I can read the caldron when no one is present as well as when I have patrons," answered Madame Gorgon.

Sam did not place much faith in the occult powers of the Witch of New York, but he did not think it the proper thing to question her assertion.

"This man is a hunted exile," Madame Gorgon went on.

"Captain Holofernes?"

"Yes."

"He can afford to be, with the wealth he has."

The woman showed her teeth in one of her hideous smiles.

"I tell you, Captain Sam—"

Her sentence was not finished, for at that moment a bell tinkled overhead and the detective left his chair.

"A visitor," smiled Madame Gorgon.

She crossed the room, touched a button which opened a little door in the wall, and for a second applied her eye to it.

"Pass beyond the curtain to the door," she exclaimed, addressing the detective. "Open the door and use your ears."

The Shadow Sphinx was not loth to obey, and in a second he had disappeared, carrying out the witch's instructions to the letter.

Madame Gorgon admitted the person who had rung, and as that one threw back a shawl that covered her head, she revealed to the astrologer the beautiful face and sleet-black eyes of the woman whose reflection in the mirror had so startled Gogol.

"You work at all hours, do you not?" asked the caller.

"At all hours," was the echo.

"They told me so. Do you tell one what obstacles beset him?"

"I do."

"And what lies in the keeping of the future?"

"Yes."

"And read the past?"

"Ay, lady."

Madame Gorgon's visitor looked pleased.

She now removed the cloak which had protected her shoulders from the drizzling rain, and stood before the fortune-teller in all the contour of her magnificent figure.

"Your hand," said Madame Gorgon, and the moment she touched the shapely hand which was thrust forward, a thrill of aversion seemed to threaten its sudden withdrawal.

"Ah! there are obstacles in the way!" exclaimed Madame Gorgon, looking searchingly at the hand before her.

"I want to know them."

"You seek success above all things."

"Who does not?"

The face of the witch dropped until the eyes that glittered like diamonds appeared to burn the white palm.

"Will you look at the magical mirror, lady?"

"I am here to learn."

Madame Gorgon led her visitor beyond a curtain which, hanging from wall to wall, cut the room in two. In the center of the second half stood a brazen table, upon which sat a bowl of metal. On the wall in front of the table hung an oval mirror in an iron frame, so adjusted that smoke rising from the bowl would obscure its polished surface.

Bidding her visitor take a certain position, Madame Gorgon threw something into the bowl, following it with a lighted match.

In an instant tiny volumes of smoke curled ceilingward, and the beautiful woman with eyes on the alert saw the mirror vanish.

At the same time Madame Gorgon disappeared and a voice which did not seem to be hers was heard:

"Let the child seeking knowledge advance and look into the mirror. She will there see the reptile that bars her way to success."

The haughty creature went forward, leaving the caldron on the left.

The face of the mirror was as white as a silver shield. The woman bent forward and watched it with bated breath.

For ten seconds she saw nothing, then a hideous-looking thing with a multiplicity of legs came crawling into view at one side and advanced slowly toward the center.

"My God!" cried the woman, recoiling suddenly, though she could not take her eyes from the sight before her. "It is a centipede!"

A dead silence followed the exclamation. The reptile, complete in every part, had stopped in the center of the mirror, and there fascinated, as it were, its astonished beholder.

"Dare you tell me, sorceress, that such an object is in my way?" cried the woman, when she found her tongue.

"It is there!" replied a voice from the woman knew not where.

"It is false!" was the quick response. "I want no trickery! I came to you for the truth, Madame Gorgon! I want nothing else."

"The Magical Mirror never lies!" answered the voice, and the visitor looking again, saw the centipede moving slowly toward the iron frame.

"Come! enough of this!" said the witch's caller as the last of the disgusting reptile disappeared.

"Let the lady look once more."

"Upon a similar sight! No! I will not!"

But, while she spoke she looked toward the magic glass and saw where the centipede had been, the huge head of a bloodhound.

"No more!" she cried. "I have seen enough! Where are you, Madame Gorgon, Queen of Charlatans?"

"I am here!"

The witch stood before the woman, appearing so suddenly that she fell back with a frightened cry.

"Queen of Charlatans, am I?" she laughed. "You sought to know what obstacle besets your path and your curiosity has been gratified. You have seen what is before you. The second scene has been—somewhere in your life. The centipede stings friend and foe alike. Beware!"

The lips of the listener curled proudly. She drew from her pocket a number of gold pieces

and extended them only to have her hand pushed aside.

"A charlatan has no right to receive pay for her work!" said Madame Gorgon sarcastically. "I refuse your money. Look! the reptile has left his trail on the surface of the mirror."

The visitor glanced over the long arm which was outstretched and saw, where the centipede had been, a darkish trail like one of blood.

"Do you want to know more?" queried Madame Gorgon.

"Not where such things take place."

The witch showed her yellow teeth again.

A moment later her visitor resumed her cloak and covered her head with the shawl she had laid aside.

"Good-night," she said.

Madame Gorgon said "good-night" with a sinister smile, and, having heard the door close upon her caller, hastened to the curtain beyond which the Shadow Sphinx had vanished and found herself face to face with him.

"Did you see her?" she eagerly inquired.

"I did."

"And the revelations of the mirror?"

"I saw those also."

The woman laughed.

"She don't like centipedes, ha! ha! But, she will come again. I have but whetted her appetite for more. I have more to show her, too. The treasures of the glass are inexhaustible. Madame Gorgon is Queen of the Charlatans! You heard her say so? She will take that back before she dies. Since she has crowned me with such a title, what ought I to call her?"

"Yes, what, Madame Gorgon?"

"The witch's hand, springing toward the detective's wrist, caught it and closed there like the jaws of an electric vise."

"What ought I to call her, eh?" she cried.

"Judith, the Centipede Queen!—Judith, the spinner of a web whose thralldom is eternal death! Either name fits her well."

CHAPTER V.

A SPY'S MISHAP.

MAJOR MASCOT sat once more in his library, and alone.

This time there was no Gogol waiting to convey a message to the Shadow Sphinx.

It was the night after the events narrated, and as before, the same drizzling rain was wetting the sidewalks, and dripping from the eaves and the shutters.

The man of luxury and leisure, attired in a rich, easy gown, embroidered by the fair hand of Nelly, his young *protegee*, occupied a chair at his writing-table, smoking, and apparently waiting for some one, just as Captain Holofernes had smoked and waited in another house the previous night.

It would be hard to tell the channel in which the major's thoughts ran at that particular time. He might have been thinking of Sam Sinton, the detective, or some person not connected with the profession may have occupied his mind.

The heavy arras behind him did not part to reflect in the mirror in his front the face which had startled the boy.

He saw nothing in the polished glass but his own handsome face; there were no creeping centipedes for him.

Major Mascot found his cigar half-gone before a step disturbed him.

Then the door to his left opened slowly, and a beautiful young girl looked timidly into the room.

"I'm here, and alone, Nelly," called out the major, and the next moment his caller tripped forward, and bending over him, imprinted a kiss on the upturned forehead.

Having done this, the girl fell back and looked strangely into his eyes.

"What is it, child?" asked the major, guessing from Nelly's countenance that she had something to say.

"I may be mistaken, but I thought not at the time. I was wide awake, for it was not my hour for retiring," and then she lowered her head and asked breathlessly:

"Had you a visitor last night?"

He returned her look with a glance that startled her.

"A visitor last night?" he repeated. "At what hour?"

"At ten."

Mascot smiled as he thought of Gogol.

"I was not entirely alone at that hour," said he. "The boy was here—"

"I saw the boy," broke in Nelly. "Was he your only caller?"

"I remember no other."

The face above Major Mascot suddenly lost color. "Was some one else here?" he queried.

"Yes," answered the girl, emboldened. "A woman."

The paper-knife which the man held lightly between thumb and finger dropped from his hand.

"Did you see her in the house?—under this roof?" he asked.

"I certainly saw a strange woman here," was the reply.

"Tell me."

"I was in the act of coming down-stairs to

bid you good-night, and had placed my foot on the first step when I saw a figure in the hall below. I knew that Nanon had been gone some time, therefore I did not think half a second of her. The woman seemed to have come through the door at the end of the corridor, and as she stood under the lamp I saw her with some distinctness."

"What was she like?"

"She was rather tall and had an elegant figure."

"Young?"

"Near her thirtieth year, perhaps."

"And handsome?"

"Beautiful—but fiercely so, I thought while I gazed."

Major Mascot seemed to reflect for a moment.

"You are sure you were wide awake, Nelly?" he asked.

"Never more so in all my life!"

"What did you think when you saw her?"

"I don't know," smiled the girl. "I might have thought many foolish things, for the encounter was so unexpected. I stood for some minutes in a trance-like state after her departure, and I tried to be my old self when I came in and bade you good-night."

"You dissembled well," rejoined the major.

"I suspected nothing."

"I recollect that I hoped so."

It was plain that Nelly's narrative had seriously disturbed the major.

"That woman was here unbeknown to me," said he frankly, as if he had resolved to tell the truth. "But don't let her visit trouble you, child."

"If you say so, I will not."

"I say so."

The girl touched her ripe lips to his cheek and he drew her down and held her face against his own several moments.

"You came to say good-night also, eh, Nelly?" he said. "Forget the figure in the hall. They can't strike us. Don't fear them. There! good-night, child." And he let her go.

Nelly hesitated as she drew back from her guardian.

His last words had strangely affected her.

What did he mean by "they can't strike us. Don't fear them?"

With the mystery heightened instead of solved, she withdrew and left him alone.

Major Mascot listened until he no longer heard her footsteps on the stairs.

"My God! have they advanced so far?" he exclaimed. "Was there a spy—a woman—in my house last night? The League increases in boldness. It crosses my threshold, invades my castles and becomes a shadow on my own hearth. Where is the man who trails the infamous conspiracy? Why isn't he here to know what Nelly saw?"

He pushed his chair back and took a revolver from a drawer in the table.

"I wish I could have seen her! I would give almost enough of my fortune to beggar Nelly if I had known when she was here. The League is still at work. It hasn't stopped a moment from the night when its victim was fished from the river with the death-sting of the accursed reptile on his neck!"

Major Mascot drew his slippers and went noiselessly up the broad steps lately pressed by Nelly. He went to a certain door on the second floor and listened at the key-hole several minutes. The interior beyond the portal was dark and still. Nelly had retired, but he could not think that she was already asleep.

Smiling to himself, he went back to the library where he donned shoes and overcoat. In another minute he was in the street amid the drizzling rain, with his coat buttoned to the chin, with collar up and hat pulled over his eyes.

It would have taken a keen eye to have recognized him as the handsome, elegant Major Mascot.

He lost no time between his house and Silent Sam's quarters.

Many wet and dark squares stretched between the two places, and Mascot drew a breath of relief when he turned into the little hall which led up to the Shadow Sphinx's room.

He found the door locked, but a light beyond. It was a bitter disappointment, and one which considerably damped his ardor.

If he could have looked into the room he would have seen Gogol asleep on the detective's cot; but, as he was not allowed this privilege, he soon withdrew, going down to the street again.

"That is he! Quick! don't miss him!" cried a voice, which Major Mascot did not hear as he turned into the street once more.

Two figures standing in the mist near Silent Sam's abode separated and one took after the rich man, following him with one hand in his pocket and a demon light in his eyes.

The major did not go back home. He seemed to think more of finding some one than of returning to the fair young girl whom he had left alone with, as he suspected, strange thoughts and a throbbing brain.

The lynx of the night kept at his heels. He too had his hat pulled over his brow, his coat was buttoned to the chin and a high collar helped to hide his face.

There was nothing but a pair of glittering eyes to tell what the trailer looked like, and even if Major Mascot had seen him in the glare of one of the street lights, he might have been as much "in the dark" as ever.

It was somewhat singular to see the persistency with which the man-lynx kept that one hand in that certain pocket.

It was not withdrawn for a second, though square after square was traversed.

All at once the major stopped and looked up at the house which stood even with the sidewalk.

He seemed to have reached his goal.

It was a commonplace, two-story house, and the nearest lamp showed him that the front door stood slightly ajar.

"Run down!" exclaimed the tracker. "What does he want in that house? Well, it's my duty to see."

Mascot had barely disappeared beyond the door ere the glittering eyes were there, and their owner slipped into the hallway and looked up a dark stair.

He saw nothing.

It was then that he wanted the eyes of an owl, or the vision of a cat.

"Don't stir! You're followed!" whispered a voice at Major Mascot's ear as he reached the top of the steps.

At the same time a hand closed on his arm and he was held with his tongue silent in his mouth and his heart in his throat.

Followed!

There was something terrible in the thought after what Nelly had told him, and after what he knew, which was a secret she did not share.

The voice and touch on the dark stair had thrilled him, for he knew that he had found the man he sought—Sam, the Shadow Sphinx!

For a minute—it seemed an hour to Major Mascot—they stood in the silent gloom. Then the hand of the detective left his arm, and he was pushed back until he touched the wall.

In an instant it flashed across his mind that Silent Sam was going to let the man below come up into a trap.

The major's heart fluttered with joy at the thought.

He was confirmed in this belief when he heard some one ascending from the hall. He wondered what the Sphinx was doing. Was he bending downward, ready to grapple with the unknown, or had he drawn back so as to let him pass?

A terrible uncertainty was attached to those moments in the dark.

Suddenly, when Major Mascot thought the unseen enemy would collide with him, there came a noise which startled him into active life.

A struggle was going on on the steps, as if Silent Sam had swooped, eagle-like, upon the man below.

"I'm always armed for foxes like you!" he heard the Shadow exclaim; and the next second something fell to the bottom of the flight with a crash that seemed sufficient to break every bone in a human body.

"We'll leave him there for the present," resumed the detective, addressing the major. "Were you looking for me? Let us go back. You'll find me a good listener," and he led the protector of Nelly down a gloomy hallway, laughing at the sudden discomfiture of the spy, and saying that he did not care if what he had done did sharpen the Centipede's sting.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

"Now," resumed the detective, when they had reached a small room at the end of the corridor where there was a light and a cheerful fire, "what has transpired that you seek me?"

Major Mascot's reply was Nelly's experience with the strange woman seen in his own house. Silent Sam listened without speaking to the end of the narrative, as if he had not heard of the visit through Gogol.

"The League becomes bold," said Major Mascot in conclusion.

"The League? Do you think she is connected with it?"

"Why not? What other spy would come to my house?"

The ferret smiled.

"You must watch for these plays," said he.

"I won't sleep a wink from now on."

"The League may go just as far in that direction."

Major Mascot looked at the fire in the grate, but said nothing.

"Did you know the spy?" he asked at length, referring to the encounter on the stair.

"It was all dark, you know."

"To be sure; but you told him that you were always prepared for foxes of his sort."

"So I did, and so I am; I trust."

"He came from the League?"

The detective went to the door as if he had caught the sound of a step beyond it.

"Again?" exclaimed Major Mascot. "Is the fellow still at work?"

Silent Sam had opened the door without noise and was looking down the hallway which ended at the top of the steps.

"It all depends on the coolness and shrewdness of that man," thought Mascot while he eyed the detective. "He has the League against him, and he keeps his own secrets. If he should fall into their snare and receive the sting of the Centipede, which is death, the game would be lost, and the death of Pagin forever unavenged. Pagin! It don't seem natural to me to want to avenge the death of a man picked from the river by a lot of wharf rats; but there is more in that crime than the world dreams of."

By this time Silent Sam, having discovered no one in the hall, had shut the door and come back to the man watching him.

"He was not out there, then?" said the major.

"I did not see him; the fall was doubtless enough for him. The next time it may be worse." And the Shadow Sphinx buttoned his coat preparatory to a departure.

When the couple had left the room a door which neither of them had used slowly opened and a man past sixty made his appearance.

His figure, if it had not been spoiled by stooping, would have been tall and imposing, but for all this his white beard gave him a commanding appearance.

He went to the fire, which he stirred for a moment, and then dropped into the chair just vacated by Major Mascot.

"It's an honor to have a boy like mine," he said audibly to himself. "He knows no fear, and keeps his own counsel. While he tells me but little about the trail he is on, I know that he is trying to clear up a mystery—to break up the power of a foul conspiracy. His trail began with the finding of the corpse in the river, two months ago. He has stuck to it ever since. Who was that man he wants to find out how and why he died? Nobody else seems to care. Nobody? How about the man who came here with him, and who went off when he departed? I don't want to play eavesdropper, but I could not help hearing what the man said; how Nelly, whoever she is, his daughter probably, saw the female spy in the house, and how she—the spy—went away unseen by Major Mascot."

"I could not help hearing all this." The old man stirred the coals again. "Now, what do I make out of it? Major Mascot is in some manner connected with Sam's trail; he is deeply interested in it, if nothing more. The spying woman belongs to what they call the League, and it is the League that Sam is fighting. If the boy—the boy under Sam's care—were here I might pick up some information, but he hasn't dropped in for a week, as if he had forgotten old Rodney."

The solitary occupant of the little room had barely ceased when a rap sounded on the door leading into the hall, and with an exclamation of, "That's Gogol!" he sprang up and crossed the room.

The next second Gogol himself pitched headlong into the room crying:

"It is the third time!"

The old gentleman turned about and stared at him.

"What do you mean, boy?" he queried.

"Just what I said. I've been singing the third time."

Gogol stood in the center of the room with flushed face and excitement dancing in his black eyes.

"Look here! My collar shows that I have been between the jaws of a trap," and he displayed to the old man's gaze a collar which hung by a few threads from his coat.

"Once headlong from the ferry-boat and twice on the street!" he went on. "This is growing interesting, though very dangerous."

"Who caught you to-night?"

"Not the same trap that performed that same duty on two former occasions," smiled Gogol. "I was on my way to see you and was making the journey cautiously, for I know that I am wanted by certain people, when all at once, at the mouth of an alley three blocks back, I was pounced upon and dragged into darkness before I realized my situation. It was the work of a second; the hand came down like an eagle's talons, and I was lifted off my feet before I had a chance to struggle. At the door of a certain house down the alley I came to my senses, and fought with all the desperateness I could. I felt that it was a struggle for life, for I know that I am in the shadow of the Centipede—"

"The shadow of what?" broke in the old man, with a quick start.

Gogol seemed to see that he had gone too far.

"Never mind," he smiled. "I saw that mine was a struggle for life, and but for my collar giving way when it did, I would have seen the inside of that house and heaven knows what else. I don't want any more experiences of the kind," and Gogol shrugged his shoulders and grinned as he toyed with the torn collar.

The old man leaned back in his chair and looked at the boy without speaking.

He had not forgotten the approach to forbidden ground—the sudden slip of the tongue, and he seemed to be debating whether to return to the subject or to let it pass.

"I guess I won't risk going back to-night," pursued Gogol, after a brief pause.

"I've a bed for you here, boy."

"Thanks! Has Captain Sam been here lately?"

"He has not been gone very long. He came with Major Mascot—"

Gogol's eyes instantly dilated.

"With Major Mascot?" he echoed.

"Yes."

"I wonder—"

Gogol stopped short and looked reflectively at the fire.

"I don't think he knows anything about it yet," he muttered. "No one saw the face among the curtains but myself. I'm tired and a little nervous. I trust you may never find yourself in the shadow, Papa Sinton."

"In the shadow of what, Gogol?" asked the old man, seeing his opportunity.

"I talk too fast. I say things I ought to keep back. Please let me stop here," and Gogol's hand fell lightly upon the old man's knee, while he looked up into his face.

"I won't push you, Gogol," was the response, in kind tones. "The bed is in the room, yonder."

"But you?"

"Oh, I'm going to sit up awhile. I can't sleep until after midnight, anyhow."

The strange boy left his chair and said "Good-night" to the old man before he glided from the room. Then the fire was stirred again by one who shook his head while he performed the service.

"The Centipede League, is it?" he mused. "I didn't let the word escape me, though Gogol tried to take it back before it was half-spoken. That lets a little more light in upon a late discovery of mine. If I could leave Gogol for an hour, I'd go and investigate."

A few minutes later the old man slipped across the room and opened the door of the sleeping-chamber. The apartment was dark, save for the little light admitted by the opening of the door, but the visitor saw the figure of Gogol on the cot.

The boy had gone to bed without divesting himself of anything but coat and shoes, and when the old man bent over him, he saw that he had already dropped off into a deep slumber.

He smiled when he bent over the sleeping lad, and for several minutes he studied the calm face as it was seen in the uncertain light.

"I think I can quit him for awhile," he said, turning away, and tiptoeing from the room, he put on a soft hat, whose wide brim came down over his brow, and left the house, locking the outer door behind him.

Half an hour afterward the old man dodged into a certain alley-street, and rapped five times with peculiar intervals between, at the door of a tall frame house.

He was admitted after some delay by a man whose front was covered by a leathern apron, and in a short time he stood in a room, with the glaring and suspicious eyes of the workman upon him.

"Duval," said the old man, boldly, "I've concluded to let you make me one."

The workman started. In an instant his eyes seemed on fire.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Come, I know what you make. You call them centipedes, though they are not real, living reptiles. You are a clever workman, Duval, and I'm willing to pay you handsomely for one of the crowning efforts of your skill."

The man raised his hand and looked furious.

"Have a care how you talk!" he exclaimed. "Why should I make centipedes in New York? One can go to the tropics—a few days' sail—and get all he wants."

The old man laughed.

"Don't let me appear deceived, Master Duval," he replied. "I'm a good secret-keeper and I want one of the curious toys—"

He was interrupted in his speech by the sudden opening of a door to his right, and a man whose face was concealed by a mask sprung into the room.

"What does he want?" this person exclaimed, looking at the workman.

"One of the toys, sir."

In a flash the masked man turned upon Gogol's friend.

"You'll get what you don't want here!" he cried. "Some people's curiosity digs their graves!"

Before the blazing eyes behind the mask the old man involuntarily fell back.

"Shut the door, Duval!" called the stranger who had the physique of a Hercules, and with the last words still on his tongue, he went at the old man, beating down the arms he threw out in self-defense, and forcing him against the wall by sheer strength.

Duval, who had obeyed the command, had turned round and was silently watching the unequal struggle, for Gogol's friend was a child in the giant's grip.

CHAPTER VII.

A NOCTURNAL SWOOP.

GOGOL slept until the light of another day began to stream into the room. I

"What's become of Papa Sinton?" thought the boy. "He did not come to bed at all last night," and he looked into the adjoining room

where he had left the old man sitting by the fire; but he was not there and the room was cold.

He was still further surprised to find that the door leading into the hall was locked, and he was forced to escape by the aid of a chair and the transom.

It did not take Gogol long to reach the street, and there being no band at the bottom of the steps to clutch him again, he lost no time in getting away from the spot.

"Papa Sinton did not think it worth while to come back," thought Gogol as he moved along. "One or two things I said last night seemed to surprise him. Hereafter I must not talk quite so fast for I don't want to offend Captain Sam by giving any of his secrets away."

Gogol went back to the Shadow Sphinx's quarters, but did not find Silent Sam at home.

"Not in, either?" exclaimed the boy. "Out on the trail of the Centipede, I reckon," and he sat down to await the detective's return.

Meanwhile the New York ferret was having a lively adventure of his own.

He and Major Mascot had left the scene of their last interview together, but at a certain place had separated, Mascot going back to his own residence alone.

Silent Sam looked at his watch, and silently noting the time, started off rapidly, to bring up at last before a one-story house in a neighborhood tenanted largely by the Russian Jews of New York.

The hour was late, but that did not threaten to interfere with the business of his visit.

A series of jerks on the brass bell-knob elicited a distant tinkling somewhere on the inside, and a squat figure, surmounted by a large head and a bearded face, appeared in the dim hallway.

The Shadow Sphinx slipped inside, and the owner of the head inspected him by the light of a tallow dip, which seemed to add a certain grotesqueness to his own appearance.

"Rather late, Ivan," grinned Silent Sam.

"Late," echoed the man with a peculiar twang of tone, which betrayed his nationality.

"Is Feodor asleep?"

"Yes."

"Does he sleep all the time?"

"Nearly all the time."

Silent Sam moved to the end of the corridor where the Russian opened a door which disclosed a room occupied by three low cots and a table.

The atmosphere of the place was close and oppressive; there was no ventilation and the ferret, unused to such a spot, found himself gasping for breath.

"Which one is Feodor?" asked Sam, with a glance at his conductor.

The Russian pointed to one of the three beds and handed the candle to the detective.

Sam advanced, light in hand, and in a moment was holding it over what appeared to be a human figure drawn up and distorted on the dirty pallet.

The face, as revealed by the dip, was brutal and repulsive. It was bearded to the eyes and, where the skin was to be seen at all, of the color of old parchment. Its owner slept heavily and it required sundry shakings on the ferret's part to unclasp the heavy lids.

He shook the man out of his slumber at last and saw him glare at him and show his teeth like a displeased wolf.

"Get up!" commanded Silent Sam.

The man did not stir.

"I have something for you," continued the detective.

"You can have nothing for me," growled the Russian.

"You don't know what I have. Get up and see."

The occupant of the pallet eyed the Shadow Sphinx a moment longer, then got up with another growl and said:

"Well, what you got for Feodor?"

There was another room beyond the sleeping chamber and Silent Sam conducted the Russian to it. He shut the door carefully behind him and set the candle upon the table in the middle of the place.

Feodor, with his deep-set little eyes fixed half-suspiciously on the Shadow Sphinx, waited sullenly for him to continue.

"Who were your companions?" asked Silent Sam.

"In there?" The Russian nodded toward the sleeping chamber.

"Yes, sir, there."

"Oh, they're no good, smiled Feodor.

"But who are they?"

"One is Sergius who has been sleeping there longer than I have; the other is a young fellow who took up quarters here a week ago."

"What does he do?"

"The last one?"

"Yes."

"I haven't concerned myself about him."

"Is he a Russian?"

"No; he's a mongrel."

Silent Sam could not avoid noticing the contempt with which Feodor spoke his reply.

"A man of mixed blood? Is that it, Feodor?"

"A yellow dog!"

"Why does he sleep here?"

The Russian shook his head.

"Maybe because the place is cheap; but I don't know," he said.

"What does he call himself?"

Feodor seemed to suspicion Silent Sam's persistent queries concerning the new lodger.

"You will have to ask old Nicolai-Ivan," he replied.

The detective said nothing for a moment.

"Now, Feodor, I come to the real business of this late call," he said when he spoke again.

He lowered his voice as he resumed:

"When did you see the colonel last?" he inquired.

Feodor drew back astonished.

"Me, captain?"

"You. I asked, when did you last see the colonel, your namesake?"

Finding the eyes of the Shadow Sphinx riveted on him and unable to escape them, the Russian was forced to respond.

"I saw him three days ago."

"Is he the right man?"

"The real Colonel Orloff?"

"Yes."

"Sometimes called the Man from Moscow?"

"The same."

"Does he know you?"

"He has probably forgotten the poor devil he had knouted on the parade," grinned Feodor.

"Does he look like the man sometimes called Pagin during his natural life?"

"One who was in the secret would have taken the pair for brothers."

This information seemed to delight Silent Sam.

"When did you see Pagin last?"

A ghastly change took possession of the Russian's face.

"Holy Mother! don't you know about him?" he exclaimed, touching his forehead.

"What about him?"

"They found him dead in the river."

"Found Pagin dead?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Two months ago. I saw him at the undertaker's."

"Are you sure it was Pagin and not Orloff, Feodor?"

The Russian reverently placed one of his dirty hands upon his heart.

"I know them both," said he. "Pagin had a scar where Orloff had none, though the colonel has one which the other did not own. Pagin's scar was in the right place. I saw it, I say. On one side of his neck there was an ugly blotch as if the body had drifted against a nail in the pier. Yes, it was Pagin and not Orloff, captain."

The Russian's positiveness appeared to satisfy the ferret.

"Thanks, Feodor," said he. "Do you know what brought the colonel to New York?"

"No, captain."

It was evident from his manner that the broad-shouldered little Muscovite spoke the truth.

"Isn't it strange that these two men—Pagin and Orloff—should resemble each other so closely?"

Feodor nodded.

"You knew both in Russia?"

"The knout made me know one better than the other," grinned Feodor.

"I don't doubt that," smiled Silent Sam.

"What became of Colonel Orloff's wife and child?"

The stolid Russian seemed to look amazed.

"Come; don't try that game," continued the Shadow Sphinx. "Answer my question."

"I do by saying that I don't know what became of them."

"Did Madame Orloff follow her husband when he left the country?"

"No."

"Did she afterward take up with a handsome man who hadn't a drop of Russian blood in his veins?—an adventurer who was fascinated by her beauty to such an extent that he became her slave at first sight?"

"I say I don't know what became of her," doggedly answered Feodor, and the detective's eyes, looking him through, as it were, said: "You lie, you old fox!" though his lips made no accusation whatever.

"We won't pursue this family affair any further, to-night," he said when he spoke again.

Feodor showed that he was ready to quit where he was, and his hand closed swiftly upon the coin which the detective dropped into it.

"You know more than you want to tell," muttered Sam, studying the face under his own.

"You may not know anything about the Centipede League, but you could tell me something about some people who have a hand in the game. I might surprise you by asking if you know the present whereabouts of the adventurer who played his game in the czar's dominions and who, if I am not mistaken, is playing another, deeper and darker still, right here in Gotham; but I won't."

"Now go back and have your sleep out, Feodor," he said to the Russian, and leading the way back to the foul sleeping apartment, he looked searchingly at the silent figures on the two cots, dwelling a little longer on one than on the other.

Feodor tumbled upon his pallet and drew the scanty bedclothes over him, and Silent Sam, dis-

missing him with another look, took the candle back to the old man waiting for him in the hall and left the house.

"I'll watch awhile and see," he said to himself, halting where the shadows shielded him a few yards from the old shell. "The last lodger—the mongrel, as Feodor calls him—isn't breathing the stifling odors of old Ivan's den for nothing."

For nearly an hour the ferret of New York watched the door of the house he had lately left. At the end of that time a figure crept forth.

"Ha! I thought so!—the Centipedes' spy!" fell from the detective's lips.

The man thus observed looked cautiously around before he moved away, and seeing, apparently, that the coast was clear, he darted down the street and disappeared round the first corner.

He was not allowed to escape so easily, for a person just as nimble as he was on his track, and he was not lost sight of until he ran up the steps of a certain house and entered with a key which he took from his pocket.

The Shadow Sphinx had tracked the spy to Captain Holofernes's!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MESMERIC TRAILER.

"THAT means a report," exclaimed the New York ferret, watching the house a few moments ere he left the spot. "Old Ivan's boarder has gone in to his master." And ending suddenly here, he walked away without making an attempt to see what was transpiring beyond the steps.

Gogol awaited Silent Sam when he got home. "Well, my boy, what is it?" queried the detective.

"The old gentleman left home unexpectedly last night."

"Papa Sinton?"

"Yes."

In a moment the Shadow Sphinx was deeply interested.

"I've been back to the house twice to-day," continued the boy. "I'm sure the door has not been opened since he went off."

"Where can he have gone?"

The detective unconsciously gave audible utterance to his thoughts.

Gogol shook his head.

A few minutes afterward Silent Sam ran up the same staircase down which he had hurled the spy who had followed Major Mascot.

He found the door leading to Papa Sinton's rooms locked, but he had a key of his own which opened it, and he soon stood in a room which confirmed Gogol's story.

Papa Sinton was the detective's father. In years gone by he had unraveled more than one dark mystery, but, growing old, he had turned the work over to his son, though he took great interest in "anything in his line," as he often said.

"He didn't intend to be gone long," mused the Shadow Sphinx, when he had examined the premises. "Father has encountered the unexpected."

If he could have had duplicated by some means the old man's visit to the house on the alley-street, if he could have seen the thrilling reception there; the sudden appearance of the masked man; the result of the asking for one of Duval's "toys"—the tigerish spring and all, he would not have remained a minute in the deserted quarters.

When he left the place his father was uppermost in his mind; he seemed to have forgotten the Centipede League, but his thoughts, hard at work, were linking the two together.

He did not go back to Gogol, as if he thought a return was not necessary, or that the boy could take care of himself.

He went to Madame Gorgon's mysterious establishment, and met with a strange smile the look of surprise which that person bestowed upon him.

"Judith has not come back, but she will come!" cried the witch. "One visit will not suffice. She is not content with seeing the centipede on the glass, but she will want to see more. The Centipede Queen may not come for some time, but I tell you she will visit me again."

"Madame Gorgon," began the detective, "I have lost my father."

The fortune-teller started.

"What! has death taken Papa Sinton?"

"Not death, I trust; but mystery."

"Oh! missing, then?"

"Missing."

"Since when?"

"Since last night."

Madame Gorgon leaned back in her chair, looked at the detective and said nothing.

"What can you do for me?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"You can show Judith startling things on the magic glass. Now, what can you show me?"

The astrologist saw the eyes of Sam the detective riveted upon her. She could not escape the look.

"I don't come to you often," continued Silent Sam. "You profess to reveal much that is hidden. You have done some wonderful things in

your art, Madame Gorgon. I admit that some of your magic is startling. I have come to you for help on a new trail—my father's."

For a moment longer the Witch of New York did not stir. She looked straight at the detective whose gaze did not quit her for a second, and when she finally left her chair she stood before him with her slender figure drawn up to the last inch of its stature.

"I will try my trailer," said she: "but, remember! I promise nothing."

"Try your trailer, Madame Gorgon?"

The detective saw the woman quit the room and for several minutes he was alone.

At the end of this time Madame Gorgon returned, leading by the hand a beautiful little girl of not more than fifteen, with a thin, almost waxen, face, and a figure as fragile as a lily's stem.

"What is this?" exclaimed Silent Sam, starting forward.

"My trailer," answered Madame Gorgon, with a smile. "This is Mysterie," and she led the child up to the Shadow Sphinx, and the little one put out her hand with a look that filled Captain Sam's heart with pity.

The next minute Madame Gorgon brought from behind a curtain a chair in which she placed the child who now watched her half dreamily through a mass of long, black lashes.

"Where did you get her?" asked the detective.

"Fortune threw her in my way," smiled the fortune-teller.

"Does her work hurt her?"

"Her trailing, you mean?"

"Yes."

The child by this time appeared asleep, and Madame Gorgon, coming close to the ferret, said in a whisper:

"Each effort takes from her so much of her life."

"Then—"

"Stop!" interrupted the woman, her hand falling at the same time on the detective's arm. "She is a marvel, and I want you to see what she can do. There isn't in the wide, wide world another child like Mysterie. You want to know—what? Where your father is?"

Silent Sam looked at the child in the chair.

"If it shortens her life a minute—"

"There, I say!" exclaimed Madame Gorgon, "the little one is ready now," and she pointed at the occupant of the chair. "If we stop where we are or go further, the result with her will be the same. She won't come out of the strange trance until the arrival of a certain time. Shall I proceed?"

"If that is true—if to go on will not injure the child any more than to stop where we are—go on," answered the detective.

Madame Gorgon lifted one of the transparent hands that hung at one side of the chair, and held it a few moments. Then she treated the other in like manner, all the time closely observed by the detective.

"Describe your father," said Madame Gorgon. "Talk to Mysterie, not to me. Tell her when he left the room, as near as you can. Describe the room also. You see we must give her a start; then, if everything is right, she will do the rest."

Drawing his chair close to the child whose hand Madame Gorgon had taken in her dark palm, Silent Sam did as he was told.

There was no sign that he could see that Mysterie was listening. She lay back in the chair like a person sleeping just before death. The last hue of life had left her face, and it was ashen in its pallor.

He studied it closely while he talked, but he could not detect the movement of a muscle.

"Can you follow the old gentleman, my child?" asked Madame Gorgon, addressing Mysterie at the end of the detective's clew. "What do you see?"

For ten seconds there was no reply.

Silent Sam was about to explain that the attempt was going to end in failure, when the witch suddenly held up one finger.

The waxen lips of the child had parted.

"I see him on the street," said she, in tones that sent the detective still closer toward her. "He walks very fast, as if anxious to come up with some one ahead. It is night, for the lamps are lighted, and the air is filled with mist."

"Follow him. Don't lose him for a moment, child," said Madame Gorgon.

"He has left the street now," continued the tenant of the chair. "I can barely follow him, for there are few lamps where he is. He keeps close to the tall old houses at his right hand, and he looks up at the door of each as if he would catch its number."

"Keep him in view," whispered the woman, and then with a glance at the detective, she said in still lower tones:

"She is following him like a hound."

Silent Sam made no reply, but watched the child with increasing interest.

"He has found his house," continued Mysterie.

"He is ringing the bell."

"Ask her about the number!" broke in the detective. "She has given me no description of the alley—for she has tracked him into such a place."

Madame Gorgon touched the disengaged hand of the child.

"Look at the door a moment, Mysterie," said she. "Tell me the number before you go in."

"The number is missing," was the response.

"I can see this much if the light isn't strong."

"What is the house like?"

The question was the detective's.

A strange shiver seemed to pass over the child's frame.

"Don't! you'll break the spell!" said the woman. "Now, child, follow him into the house."

The mesmerist's little victim appeared to take a long breath.

"I have followed him in," she said. "The door is shut; he stands in a hallway with a man who wears a leathern apron. They pass into an adjoining room."

"What do they say, child?"

A silence of several seconds followed.

"I'm back in the house again," resumed the child.

Madame Gorgon and Silent Sam exchanged strange glances.

"Where have you been, Mysterie?" queried the New York witch.

"Something took me away for a spell," was the reply. "I was in another part of the city. I saw a handsome man come out of an elegant house. I followed him; he took me into the alley street—to the house which has no number over the door. Thus I am back in it."

"In the room with the old gentleman and the man with the apron?"

"Yes."

"Well, let nothing escape you, child."

"A door opens and the old gentleman sees it not," continued Mysterie. "A man enters the room. His face wears a mask. He glares at the old man like a tiger. I hear him say to the working man: 'Shut the door, Duval!' and now he leaps at him with hands out and forces him against the wall!"

"My God!" burst from the Shadow Sphinx's lips. "My father has fallen into a death-trap!"

Madame Gorgon dropped the hand she had held, and sprang to the city ferret.

"Silence! or you'll break the spell!" she cried, clutching him like a maniac, and almost touching his face with her lips. "We want the child to go to the end of this mystery."

"I am silent. Urge her to the end."

The witch turning to the tenant of the chair saw that it was useless. The eyes, half closed a moment before, were wide open now and were riveted on Silent Sam with a wondering stare.

Madame Gorgon, with a significant look at the detective, shook her head.

"It is too late!" said she. "Mysterie is out of the spell, and it cannot be resumed."

"Never?" asked the ferret.

"Never! She can traverse a trail but once."

As the woman spoke she lifted the exhausted child from the chair and tenderly carried her from the room.

"What do you think?" she questioned eagerly when she came back.

"A wonderful child. She has tracked my father to one of the League's traps."

"One of the League's traps?"

"Yes. You heard her speak of the man who came out of the elegant house?"

"I did."

"I say no more, Madame Gorgon. Let the future speak for itself. They call me Silent Sam," and before the clock had ticked off another minute, the Witch of Gotham was alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVELATION.

If the Shadow Sphinx had followed the man whom he had tracked from old Ivan's loathsome den to the threshold of the elegant house which stood among a number of palatial residences, he would have seen him greeted by the man already known to the reader as Captain Holofernes.

The very actions of the person thus shadowed by the detective proclaimed him a cool spy who had taken up quarters at Ivan's for a purpose. He seems to have believed that, sooner or later, Silent Sam would come to Feodor, his fellow-lodger, for information, and no sooner had the interview terminated than he was off to his master, followed, though he knew it not, by the man who had pitted his coolness and acumen against the Centipede League.

As we have said, beyond the door of the mansion to which he had been tracked, he met the handsome, dark-eyed man called Captain Holofernes.

The spy found the captain in the library, to which he proceeded after letting himself into the house, and the man there greeted him with a smile which was accompanied by a look of surprise. Evidently the spy was not expected just then.

"He came at last!" exclaimed the spy, who was not past twenty-five—a young man with an olive complexion, set off by a small, black mustache and vivacious-looking eyes of the same hue.

Captain Holofernes at once became all attention.

"At last, Carlos?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

The young man glanced toward the door which he had left ajar.

"Never mind her," smiled Captain Holofernes, noting and interpreting the look. "She does not have to hear everything. Go on."

Thus addressed, the spy began, and after passing lightly over his sojourn at Old Ivan's, came to the report in hand.

He had not been able to catch all the conversation that passed between the detective and Feodor, but he had obtained enough to give Captain Holofernes's eyes a new gleam, and to send the blood to his ample temples.

All this time, though the two knew it not, a figure was hanging over the balustrade in the hallway just without the room, and a woman was looking in upon the scene over the top of the open door, eying the men like a tiger-cat, while her ears eagerly devoured every word.

"You have not been suspected, Carlos?" queried Captain Holofernes.

"I didn't become one of Ivan's boarders for that purpose."

"Of course not; but Feodor may have sharper eyes than you give him credit for."

"But not sharp enough to unmask me. Why, the old fellow sleeps half his time like a bear when it is cold. I'd wager my head that I have not been suspected. But I hope I'm done with the old den."

Captain Holofernes shook his head.

"What! must I go back there?" cried the young spy at this demonstration.

"You must."

"It is a terrible place."

"No doubt of it."

Captain Holofernes leaned across the table that stood between him and the spy.

The League commands," said he, meeting the youth's look.

"I obey," was the answer.

"I don't question your loyalty. We will soon recall you from the old trap. You have rendered us an important service."

"Put the detective out of the way; and from that moment it will be clear sailing."

The captain nodded with a smile.

"So he seemed to be anxious to know whether Pagin and Orloff looked alike, Carlos?" he asked.

"He did."

"And Feodor told him that they were each other's doubles?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he will come back soon?"

"I hope he will if his coming is to secure my recall."

Captain Holofernes said nothing.

All this time the figure on the staircase did not move.

Carlos the spy went to a sideboard and Captain Holofernes watched him help himself to some liquor there.

"If Feodor should suspect you—what?" he asked, still looking at the spy.

"I'll strike before his suspicion does any harm!" was the response. "Nothing is easier."

The young man took from his bosom a small box which he held up with a devilish laugh.

"You must not use it unless you are forced to do so," remarked Captain Holofernes, looking at the box.

"Of course not. The old fellow sleeps like a log. To-morrow the other lodger goes away, and Feodor and I will have the pen to ourselves."

He put up the box as he finished and buttoned his coat over it.

"Be very cautious," resumed Captain Holofernes. "This watch-dog is shrewd. There is said to be none better in the city. The boy is fully under his protection. He has slipped through our fingers like an eel."

"That's because you don't catch him right," laughed the spy.

"Maybe not. We'll have to set you after him, Carlos."

"Try me!" was the quick retort. "I'd sooner have an open air trail than a den watch. But I don't shirk duty. I forget not that I belong to the League. How is she?"

"As well as ever."

The woman looking over the door started for the first time, and fixed her eyes strangely upon Captain Holofernes.

A little later the spy withdrawing left the library tenanted by but one person, but it did not remain so long.

A silken step came down the staircase, and the lamp in the hall revealed the queenly figure of the woman called Judith.

Captain Holofernes was not aware of her presence until he heard his name spoken in tones that seemed to send a thrill through him.

"What did he want at this hour?" she asked, as their eyes met.

"Did you see him?"

"Passing from the house—a glimpse; but it was enough to identify him."

The man leaning back in the chair at the table twisted the ends of his mustache and seemed to admire the creature before him.

"He brought an unimportant report—nothing more," he answered.

He got the lie direct from the woman's eyes.

"Carlos was to bring nothing unimportant," said she. "He was to be judge and he knows enough to distinguish the good from the bad."

"Yes."

"He has been sent back to duty, eh?"

"Back to duty."

"To the old Russian's den?"

"Yes—back to Ivan's."

"But his report to-night? I want that."

Captain Holofernes secretly bit his lips, but finding himself under the watchful spell of Judith's eye, he gave her a garbled account of the spy's report.

"Why this half-way story?" cried Judith, with a laugh. "When will you entirely trust any one? I know what Carlos brought. Not a word of his report escaped my ear."

The handsome man started.

"He heard something very important at Old Ivan's. The fox has struck a scent. The bloodhound is at work."

Captain Holofernes looked up at the woman saying nothing.

"The man in the fine house is working with him," continued Judith.

"Major Mascot?"

"Major Mascot! Listen to me. A man is found floating in the river; the body has been in the water some time. The papers contain a good deal about the find. Major Mascot has saved every scrap of news about the dead man. Why?"

There was no reply.

"This city ferret accidentally sees the dead man at the coroner's. A sailor puts him to thinking. We meet, and laugh at the detective's discovery; we say in this room that he will soon drop the trail and take up another. Does he do so? That man-fox is still on the scent. He picks up little links here and there; he falls in with the boy called Gogol. He knows that Orloff—the man who felt the sting right where I stand—came to New York—he has discovered that Pagin taken from the river and Orloff looked alike. He goes to Old Ivan's at night and shakes Feodor out of a sound sleep to ask him some questions. Among them are several about a woman who lived in Russia. He wants to know so and so about her. Captain Holofernes, you sit there and look at me like a man in a maze. You seem to treat my words with contempt. Is this ferret harmless? Do you expect to triumph with the detective hot on the trail? Speak!"

She drew off and looked at him with a fiery spirit that added to her haughty beauty.

"Don't blaze," said he coolly. "Keep ice on your fire lest it unnerve you and spoil the game. I overrate nothing. I know how the game progresses and where the dogs are. I don't think a move is made that I do not know of it almost as soon as executed. The detective is making a trap to catch himself. This man who has taken the boy under his wing is one of the best of his class. He expects to achieve the greatest triumph of his life from the dead man picked out of the harbor by the pier vultures. Let him alone and he will succeed. Give him full swing and he will crush the Centipede and render its sting harmless. You must not think that I am idle because you always find me here when you come."

"I have made no such charges."

"I did not say so. The detective keeps his secrets. He is famous for that," continued Captain Holofernes. "He shares none of them with Gogol—three times escaped from the clutch. This trait of silence in Sam Sinton is a great thing for us."

"I hope so. If he should encounter Madame Gorgon—the witch who can make centipedes crawl at will across a mirror—he might pick up another link."

Captain Holofernes laughed.

"The old witch can be checkmated if she is liable to do anything with her black arts," said he. "But who is she?"

He seemed to look Judith through and through as he asked the question.

"She is a human mystery," was the answer.

"Didn't you ever try to fathom her?"

"I've thought of her many times since quitting her den."

"Without solving the puzzle?"

"Yes."

A smile lurked in the depths of Captain Holofernes's eyes.

"You know her!" cried the Centipede Queen, accusingly.

The captain drew toward him a bit of paper and hastily scribbling two names thereon handed it to Judith.

The woman clutched it eagerly and read aloud:

"MADAME GORGON."

SOPHIA SANDORF."

With a curse she crushed the paper in her hand and threw it upon the table.

"If that be true," cried she, "the Witch of New York is doomed from this moment. She must die!"

CHAPTER X.

SHARPENING THE STING.

CAPTAIN HOLOFERNES looked at the speaker smiling and silent.

"Sophia Sandorf?" continued Judith. "Who told you?"

"Do you doubt?" returned the man.

"No, but—"

"A genuine surprise?—a thunderbolt, eh? I thought so!"

"A surprise. I admit it," answered the Queen of the Centipede. "Now the Magic Mirror is a humbug and its possessor the worst of charlatans. I see the Witch of Gotham in a new light. She must die!"

The last words were pronounced with more emphasis than were those of similar import which had already fallen from her tongue.

"You must be very careful now that you know the woman," admonished Captain Holofernes.

"Leave that to me. There can be no deception about this? Make no mistake."

"None has been made," replied the man, still watching her. "Madame Gorgon is the person I have named to you."

"Enough!" cried Judith drawing back.

"I say once more, be cautious. You know her of old; the tigress has lost none of her cunning by being transplanted in this country."

"As if I cannot watch her!" was the quick rejoinder. Look well to the movements of the Shadow Sphinx. I will not ask after the source of your startling information. I accept it as being true. Sophia Sandorf. Would to Heaven I had suspected her while I gazed at the mirror in her den. Good-night."

Captain Holofernes responded to Judith's good-night and watched her until the last fold of her garments had disappeared, then taking up the paper which she had cast upon the table opened it and seemed to study the two names he had written there.

"It is woman against woman; serpent and serpent!" he laughed to himself, tearing up the paper and casting the pieces into a waste-basket at his side. "I thought the revelation would fall upon her like a bomb from the clear heavens. I was sure she had not forgotten Sophia Sandorf, but she did not dream that she had lately visited her. The old schemer has changed, thanks to time and science; she no longer resembles the cunning person whose hand was in the other game which resulted so disastrously to our hopes. I am to watch and checkmate the Shadow Sphinx, while Judith for a diversion deals with the new discovery. No person but Sophia Sandorf could send a centipede across a mirror and follow it with the head of a bloodhound. I don't wonder that Judith started. The pictures were suggestive of two countries—Cuba and Siberia!" And Captain Holofernes looked at the clock that ticked on a mantel across the room and helped himself to a cigar from the box always open and never empty on the table at his elbow.

"What is the major worth?" he suddenly resumed. "Two millions at least. He enjoys life in a certain way, but there is a shadow back of him. The girl is young and pretty. His word! ha! ha!" Captain Holofernes removed the cigar from between his lips and laughed. "They call her that. Nelly Mascot—she bears his name no matter who she is—is a fine catch for somebody, but he guards her like a dragon. I ought to be satisfied, but I am not. The woman up-stairs is in a new ferment. My head against an eagle that she is wide awake now thinking about Sophia Sandorf. Don't let your thoughts unnerve your hand, Queen Judith. The Centipede can't dispense with your craft. It has several things to meet: the Shadow Sphinx is in its way, and Gogol is still a dangerous element. A boy dangerous to us? I laugh when I think of it, but that does not destroy the truth."

Captain Holofernes seemed to have become suddenly impressed with a feeling that his privacy had been invaded, for at the end of his speech he looked round and saw just beyond the door at his back a man whose head was encircled by a bandage.

"Come forward, Jack! What is it?"

The man advancing at the captain's look and without waiting for permission, showed a youngish and not unhandsome face with two intensely black eyes that burned as if with a fever.

"I can't sleep," he said, looking down at Captain Holofernes. "I want to get even."

The man in the chair met his hot words with a smile.

"My wonder still is that I didn't break my neck," continued he of the bandaged head. "I went down that dark stair to the bottom, striking every step, as I verily believe, in the descent and finally hitting the floor with a thud hard enough to break a head of stone. 'I feel it yet,' the man put his hand to his head. 'I can't sleep for the pain that racks my skull. That hound has the grip of a vise, and the strength of a lion.'"

"He looks like it," commented Captain Holofernes.

"I did not expect to meet him at the head of the stairs. I was after the millionaire major," was the response. "But the moment I was gripped I knew I had found the Shadow Sphinx. What are the orders?"

"I have none now."

"Then, I can get even at the first opportunity, can I?"

At the same time the man tore the bandage from his head and threw it half-way across the room.

"What does this mean?" cried Captain Holofernes.

"I'm going back to the trail. I want to show Sam Sinton that the man who pitched headlong down the dark staircase forgets nothing."

"But you are still in the hospital," smiled the captain.

"I have left it by the act you have just witnessed!" exclaimed the spy, pointing to the bandage on the floor. "Vengeance makes me well."

"You'll spoil everything with your hot head."

"The air will cool it off," grinned the spy.

"I doubt it."

"What did Carlos know?"

Captain Holofernes at first looked indignant.

"But little," he answered, evidently changing his mind a moment before he spoke. Carlos is still on duty."

"Is Judith at home?"

The captain sent a swift glance toward the door by which the Queen of the Centipede had lately quitted the room.

"Judith is in," he replied.

"And satisfied with the progress of the game?"

"Yes."

"Does she know—"

The spy catching, as it seemed, the full meaning of Captain Holofernes's look, broke his own sentence.

"Go on," said the captain.

"Does she know how far this Gotham ferret has advanced? Is she fully aware of the relations that exist between him and Major Mascot?"

Captain Holofernes bowed.

"Does she know that the detective has given the boy Gogol—the chap who slips through one's fingers like an eel—the full benefit of his protection?"

Another nod.

"The next time I'll hold the pest!" exclaimed Jack. "Three times he has escaped."

"Three times," echoed Captain Holofernes.

The spy was silent for a moment.

"So you have no orders?" he abruptly queried.

"None just now."

The minion of the League fell back looking strangely at his master, who drummed lightly with the tips of his fingers on the table before him.

At last, as the captain did not speak, he turned toward the door, which he opened, and passed from the room.

Captain Holofernes waited until the footsteps of the spy had died away beyond the portal, then he pushed back his chair and crossed the room.

Kneeling in front of a large safe with a door of steel he opened it, and took from the interior a small box which he carried to the table.

The box had a sliding lid, and Captain Holofernes opening it by a slight pressure, turned it upside down.

The next moment there lay on the green cloth in the light what appeared to be a large centipede.

For a moment the man eyed the reptile with a satisfied smile, then, taking it up with his naked hand as though he did not fear its sting, he contemplated it with a smile of triumph.

"Duval knows how to get them up!" he chuckled, turning the reptile round and round so as to show the legs and the whole disgusting mechanism of the body. "There's a thousand deaths in the symbol of the League. Those who feel its sting will never be stung again. The secret belongs to us. Sophia Sandorf, with all her cunning, has not discovered it, though she sends a centipede across the magic mirror to frighten Judith."

The reptile wiggled in Captain Holofernes's grasp like a thing of life, but it was soon evident that it was only a mechanical centipede so well done as to deceive the most observing and suspicious.

All at once the captain put the object back on the table, and by means of a pair of small pincers, which he took from his pocket, opened what seemed a tiny door in the reptile's back. Then he unlocked a drawer underneath the table and produced a vial half filled with a watery-looking compound, a part of which he fed to the centipede by means of the pincers and through the opening in the back.

When this operation was completed he lifted the death-trap with more care than he had before displayed while handling it, and deposited it back in the box, which he bore across the room to the safe.

"There never was anything like it," said he. "It is deadlier than the living, creeping one of the tropics. It never quits the flesh it feeds on until the victim is past hope. What can the enemy do when we fight him with a thing like that? The cunning of the Shadow Sphinx is powerless against the secret that is in our keeping. The millions of Major Mascot quit him the moment the Centipede fairly crosses his path; he loses everything—his wealth, Nelly, his desire for vengeance. Our bite is death! The sting of the Centipede means eternal destruction."

The door of the safe shut without a sound, and Captain Holofernes came back to the table.

"The old man was too fast," he went on. "He should have kept away from Duval's workshop. He hasn't the acuteness of his ferret offspring, but he might have become dangerous. It was luck that I reached the house when I did. Duval must be careful whom he trusts. The secret must not be in danger. The Centipede must do its work for a little while longer. Then we can rest on our oars with the victory won, for there will be no Shadow Sphinxes to follow up the trail of the death reptile."

"And no one left for it to bite!" said a voice, and Captain Holofernes, looking up, beheld between him and the door the magnificent figure of Judith, the Centipede Queen.

CHAPTER XI.

A PARENT'S TRAIL.

SILENT SAM went from Madame Gorgon's house with more excitement than he had known since taking up the trail of the Centipede League.

He was certain that the strange child not inappropriately called Mysterie by the fortune-teller, had followed to a dangerous point the fate of his own father—known as Papa Sinton.

It was not every one who knew of the relationship existing between the detective and the handsome old man who dwelt alone in a certain quiet neighborhood.

It is true their names were identical, but Silent Sam kept his secrets so well that their kin had become one of them. He generally visited his father after dark, and the old man, proud of his son, had the entire love of that son for his reward.

"Father first," said the Shadow Sphinx to himself. "The Centipede trail can rest a little while; but do not both trails run together? What did Mysterie, the child, say, while under the mesmeric spell? She saw a handsome man come out of an elegant house, and she tracked him in her trance to the building without a number in the alley. Let me see. There are a dozen alley-streets in the neighborhood. Into which one did he go after leaving Gogol asleep on his couch? Father has been doing some work on his own hook. He can't wholly quit the profession, though I have begged him a thousand times to do so, and have kept my secrets from him. What took him to the house without a number? I can think of but one answer. He has suspected the existence of the League."

The Shadow Sphinx went back to the quarters which Papa Sinton had so mysteriously deserted.

They were found as he had left them—the fire out and the rooms cold and empty.

He went back to the street and walked down the pavement among the lights.

"It is worth trying," he said half audibly. "The woman does not know our relationship, and she may have seen him."

Three blocks away he opened the front door of a little tobacco store, the only one in the immediate vicinity, and was met by a pleasant-faced woman, who stepped forward to wait on him.

"Has Papa Sinton been in this evening?" queried Sam.

The woman shook her head.

"I have not seen him since he passed last night," she answered.

"You saw him, then?"

There was an eagerness, blended with anxiety, in the detective's tones, which he could not suppress.

"It was by accident. The hour was eleven—"

"Do you keep open that late?"

"No; we close at ten—our invariable custom," smiled the woman. "Last night at the hour I have mentioned I came down-stairs to put away a box of fancy pipes which we had received a few days before and were displaying in the show window. I had forgotten them on retiring, and there are those who would not stop to break a glass and play grab for a prize like those pipes. I could not find the box very readily in the dark, so I lit the jet in the show window. As I was lifting the pipes I heard a step that halted by the window and looking up saw Papa Sinton who was standing outside and evidently wondering what I was doing there at that hour. I nodded to him and he returned the nod with a smile, then disappeared, and I went back."

"Which way did he go?"

"Down the street."

Silent Sam looked pleased.

There was one link picked up by the merest chance. He had discovered that three blocks from his lodgings his father was still keeping on toward the river.

He found the woman looking searchingly at him all the time she talked.

"There's a good deal of resemblance," she said at last.

"Between whom?"

"Why, between you and Papa Sinton."

The detective affected to smile.

"Is the old man wanted?—is he missing?" was the next remark. "Don't you know where he lives?"

To all these questions the detective answered

"yes," and anxious to go back to the trail which had had a beginning he patronized the shop and went away before a battery of interrogatives could be opened on him.

He kept on down the street.

At the mouth of the first alley, which had a narrow sidewalk on each side he stopped and looked over his shoulder.

Might it not be here? arose in his mind.

He saw far down the forbidding thoroughfare the lamp of the street beyond. It looked like a star trying to penetrate the darkness that lay heavily between him and it.

Here and there in the alley was a light, as it fell from some window, but the beams did not make the alley any the brighter for the effort.

"I'll go through it," thought Silent Sam. "If Mysterie had been more descriptive—if she had but followed him closer when he was on the street I would know something and not be groping in the dark."

He chose the right-hand side of the alley and plunged into it.

In a moment he had passed beyond the pale of light on the sidewalk, and his figure hardly threw a shadow as he advanced.

But his keen eyes searched every door that he saw. As if they were as sharp as a hawk's they saw the numbers and even noted what some of them were.

Suddenly, when nearly midway between the two streets, the New York detective saw a door that had no number. He looked the second time to assure himself that he had not made a mistake.

His heart gave a quick throb of joy, but he kept his self-possession.

"There may be a thousand numbered houses in New York," he said to himself, but he did not cease to look at the one before him and when he had passed it he came back and looked again.

Not a vestige of light telling that it was inhabited came from any of the windows, all of which had shutters, closed at the time. He passed close to the door and inclined his head toward it as he did so; but no sound greeted his ears.

"The child gave me a clew, though not a good one," he exclaimed. "A house with no number. It is rather vague. Yet it is something, and I must accept it."

The detective had stopped in the alley which seemed deserted notwithstanding the earliness of the hour. He was still watching the unnumbered house.

Presently a door just beyond the one he had his eye on opened and a child slipped into the street.

"Don't come back without it!" said a gruff voice ere the door was shut, and Silent Sam saw the hesitating figure of the little one on the pavement.

In another moment the child came toward him, and as he watched it he drew back toward the house, deeper into the shadow, as it were, and became a statue there.

The child, a boy, bare-headed and not past ten, approached him, mumbling something which Sam could not interpret, but when quite near him it stopped and looked distrustingly toward the street.

"They'll catch me at it one of these days—I know they will," the detective now heard. "They'll send me out to the work once too often, but what do they care for that? If the cops were to nab me they'll wait till Jess got old enough to use his fingers, and then they'd put him into my shoes. There's nothing out there but the claws of a cop, and I don't want to go; but I've got my orders. I know what they mean."

Strange emotions filled the detective's breast while he listened to the soliloquy of the child thief. The little fellow stood almost within reach of his arm, and he could see the trim though poorly-clad figure, and the slim hand which had no doubt violated the law a hundred times.

When the child moved away, going to a duty it abhorred, young as it was, the detective left his post and glided after it.

"Don't I know they'll catch me some time?" muttered the boy. "Didn't they nab Bill, and isn't he doing time for it now? And he was put at it before he was as old as I am."

Silent Sam could not help smiling at the child's uttered thoughts.

At last he came up with the boy, and with a cry that seemed to drive every particle of bravery from him, the little fellow fell back at the touch of the detective's hand.

"I knowed it!" he exclaimed, gazing up into the Shadow Sphinx's face. "I could have told 'em so. You're a cop in plain clothes, ain't you?"

"That's as how you take me," answered the ferret. "You are—"

"Bolly!"

"Bolly?"

"Bolly Blevins! I live back there in the alley—next to the house that's lost its number, if it ever had one."

"Who lives in it?"

"That's a question," grinned the boy.

"Don't you know?"

"No, and nobody else does, only them what's in the secret."

Silent Sam was already in the boy's confidence to some extent.

"I hear 'em in there, but not all the time," continued the child-thief. "Now and then I catches sight of a man at the back window."

"What sort of a man?"

"A fellow with a beard, and sometimes with an apron before him."

"A leather apron, Bolly?"

"Looks like it, Cap."

Silent Sam thought of Myserie's short description of the man who had admitted his father to the strange house.

He too had a leathern apron on.

"Your neighbors don't bother you, then?" queried Sam.

"Never. We don't disturb them, and they return the compliment."

"Have they any visitors?"

The boy drew back and looked up into the detective's face several seconds before he spoke again.

"They don't have many callers," he said, as if he had decided to be communicative and take the chances.

"But they have a few?"

"Yes."

"Any last night?"

"Two."

"Did they come together?"

"No; the old man came alone."

The old man!

The Shadow Sphinx felt a thrill at the boy's expression and looked toward the house.

"I've found the trap!" he cried to himself. "Woe to you demons if you have harmed a hair of his head!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUSE OF THE LOST NUMBER.

THE gamin of the alley caught Silent Sam's glance and seemed to wonder what it meant.

"Did you see the old man come out of house?" asked the detective.

"I did not."

"What was the other man like? You say there were two visitors last night."

"I could not see his face for his high collar."

"Did he come down into the alley from the street yonder?"

"He did."

"Bolly," said the Shadow Sphinx, "I heard you talking to yourself a while ago."

"Did you?"

"Yes, but you need not do anything in your line to-night."

It was a strange look he received from the boy, for as he spoke, Sam had taken his hand from his pocket and pressed some money into the dirty hand.

"What's this for?" exclaimed the little thief, looking up into the detective's face.

"To keep you out of mischief," was the reply.

"Thanks, cap'n," grinned the boy. "This is better 'n getting it the old way."

Sam walked with his companion to the broader street and watched him until his figure disappeared, for the two had agreed that Bolly should not return home for an hour at least, when he could establish the impression that he had come by the money which he jingled in his hand by "the old way."

The Shadow Sphinx of Gotham was anxious to follow up the clew he had obtained by an extraordinary piece of good luck. He looked down the alley and thought he could single out the house which he believed held the mystery which hung over his father's disappearance.

But how to get into it was the question.

After a time he vanished from the spot where he had separated from the child pickpocket, and a few minutes afterward a human figure appeared in the cramped back yard of the suspected house.

Silent Sam was sure he had not mistaken the premises.

Looking upward and ahead he saw the looming shape of the house of the lost number. The back windows were as dark as those he had seen in front, and no sounds that told that the building was inhabited came to his ear.

He crept forward until he reached a door. This door was beneath one of the windows, the sill of which seemed almost within his reach.

Suddenly there came to the detective's ears the sound of a hammer. The taps were muffled to some extent, as if the hammer were striking iron covered with a layer of velvet.

"Duval at work," thought the detective, going back to Myserie's mesmeric description of the man with the leathern apron. "What do they manufacture in there? Centipedes?"

At any other time he would have laughed at the suggestion, but now, from what he knew and had picked up here and there during his trail, the word had a terrible significance.

He listened for ten minutes more to the measured taps of the hammer. He believed that the workman was in the room straight ahead, but the door had no cracks by which he could catch a glimpse of the man.

Silent Sam at last resolved to try the window,

not the lower one but the one directly above the door. He drew his shoes and lifted his body upon the sill of the shuttered window of the ground floor.

From this place he could touch the one above. In another minute the detective had demonstrated that all closed shutters are not fastened, for he had opened the one overhead and now had nothing between him and the interior of the house and the lower sash.

Confident of his ability to take care of this, he drew his body up once more and tried the frame. It moved, and his heart for a moment seemed to stand still.

The Shadow Sphinx was laboring under great disadvantages; they taxed his strength as well as his courage, but with his teeth together like a man of resolution, he worked away until he had raised the sash and put his head in.

It was not long before he had his shoulders beyond the sill, then his body followed and soon afterward the detective of New York dropped to the floor of a dark apartment with the silken fall of a cat.

Silent Sam's first act was to listen once more for the hammer.

Tap, tap, tap!

He heard it with more distinctness than before, and the sound seemed to come up through the floor at his feet.

"This is a hunt in the dark, but I'll have light by and by," murmured the ferret.

He felt his way to the head of a flight of steps and leaned downward in the gloom.

"He's down there—Duval!" he thought, listening to the busy hammer, and then he glided toward the unseen floor, step by step, but as surely as if his feet had eyes as keen as those in his head.

He was half-way down the flight when the hammer ceased.

The sudden cessation caused the detective to stop.

If he could have looked down through the wall at his left—downward through lath and plastering—he might have prepared for a desperate struggle.

He would have seen a man bending over a workbench along a wall, with a leathern apron on his breast and a green shade for his eyes. A number of tiny bits of steel and little pincers lay before the man, and the half-finished work in his hands looked somewhat like a strange reptile—a centipede!

The workman was using the hammer when a bell hanging along the wall above the bench warned him by its tinkling.

In a moment the hammer became suspended in mid-air, then it was put aside and the work was swept into a drawer before the workman.

"Somebody is on the stair!" exclaimed the man, springing back from the bench. "The bell has performed its duty. I must meet this intruder!"

He divested himself of the apron, threw the eye-shade across the bench, took from a rack along the wall a dagger with a bright six-inch blade and advanced toward the door.

If Silent Sam could have seen these movements he would have done more than listen for the hammer whose sudden silence had halted him on the dark steps.

The putting of his foot upon one of them had sent a warning through walls to the workman; it had armed the centipede-maker in the drop of an eyelash as it were.

Hearing nothing the Shadow Sphinx of Gotham stood for several minutes where he had halted, then proceeded down the staircase.

The bell along the wall in the workshop repeated its warning, but Duval, knife in hand at one side of the room and with the knob in his grip did not look back though he acknowledged the bell with a smile.

Silent Sam reached the floor below without accident.

"I've silenced the hammerer, anyhow," he said to himself. "I'll follow this corridor a little distance. One has to have his eyes in his fingers here."

He had not moved far ere a shaft of light flashed across the wall he was following.

The door behind him had opened, but when he turned it had closed again and the light was gone.

"Somebody came out of that room!" flashed across the Shadow Sphinx's mind. "Whoever it was is down yonder in the dark. Is it Duval?"

He waited a few minutes with his back to the wall, seeing nothing, hearing no sound.

Meantime Duval, like a breathless tiger, seemed to be measuring distances in the dark.

"The intruder is just ahead, within an easy leap," thought he. "He is on the left hand side of the corridor. I believe he heard me open the door. At any rate he must have seen the beam of light that shot across the wall."

Duval, with the knife in his left hand put out his right and seemed to reconnoiter with it along the smooth surface.

"Why not?" he asked himself. "There is an enemy in the house—a foe of the League. It may be the Shadow Sphinx himself. He must be beaten before he has discovered too much."

Duval moved one foot forward.

At that moment Silent Sam went toward him.

The following second the detective drew back. He had touched something in the dark and that something, though instantly withdrawn, a human hand on the wall!

If he could have seen ahead he would have braced himself for the charge that was inevitable.

Duval lost no time after his hand was touched. As it fell he went forward like a leaping animal, and struck the enemy exactly where he expected to find him.

"Die, spy!" fell from the centipede-maker's tongue.

There was no answer beyond the hand which met the descending arm and checked it in mid-air, the fingers seeming to bury themselves in the wrist.

Duval growled a curse and tried to free his arm, but it was stubbornly held by the foe. Then he threw himself upon Silent Sam, forcing him nearly off his feet, but not breaking the iron grip he had taken.

The next instant the tables were turned, and it was Duval who went along the wall and toward his own workshop, forced over the floor by the detective's resistless power.

"There is one chance yet!" mentally ejaculated the inventor of the League. "If I can clutch the cord!—if he will let me grip that but for a moment—I'll finish the fight in our favor. I was right. This man is the Shadow Sphinx of New York."

Duval's knife had been wrenched from his hand by a sudden twist, which seemed to have broken his arm at the wrist.

All at once he touched the door of the workshop, the next second he was forced against it, and as it flew open, revealing the interior, the two men fell headlong across the floor!

They went down together at the foot of the work-bench, Duval turning at the right moment, bringing him on top.

A desperate struggle for a moment, and he was free.

He leaped up with a sharp cry, and bounded away.

Silent Sam was also on his feet, but ere he could resume the battle he saw Duval throw up one hand and grasp a dark cord.

The centipede-maker gave one strong pull, and then the floor seemed to part under the ferret's feet, and as he dropped, a laugh of victory filled his ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLASS OF WINE.

MAJOR MASCOT, the protector of the girl called Nelly, entered his library while the shadows of another night were gathering, and threw himself wearily into a chair at the table.

He was the sole occupant of the room.

"There's something mysterious about this absence," said he. "Three times have I called, finding no one—not even Gogol, who should have turned up somewhere."

At this moment his gaze fell upon a piece of folded paper on the cloth before him, and snatching it up, he tore it open with an eagerness he could not control.

It read briefly:

"I may not be back until after dark. Have no fears for me. NELLY."

This was written in his young ward's chirography, and Major Mascot smiled strangely, and not altogether at his ease as he laid it down.

Nelly did not have a large circle of acquaintances and but seldom visited among those she had, and the brief note puzzled him the more on this account.

He looked at his watch and started slightly as he noted the time.

Night had come and Nelly was not at home.

Major Mascot waited awhile longer and then slipped away.

He went up to the second floor where the girl had her apartments.

He found the door locked and no solution of the mystery there.

A few minutes later he re-entered the library with his perplexity increased as his look told.

All at once the bell rung sharply.

"That's something!" exclaimed the major, and rushing into the hallway he admitted—Gogol.

"Has he been here?" inquired the boy.

"No," answered Major Mascot, guessing at once to whom Gogol referred. "But come in and tell me what you know," and he caught Gogol by the collar, as if afraid he would run away, and almost forcibly dragged him into the house.

"When did you see him last?" queried the millionaire.

"Yesterday."

"At what time?"

"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"What did he say?"

"I caught a glimpse of him on the street."

Major Mascot looked disappointed.

"I can't account for his absence," continued the boy. "You know what sort of trail he is on?"

Major Mascot bowed.

"I don't mean the League's trail just now."

"What, another?"

"He is anxious about Papa Sinton."

"Is the old gentleman missing?"

Gogol replied by telling all he knew about the old man's disappearance.

For some time after the ending of the story Major Mascot looked at the boy without speaking.

"Gogol," he finally said, "where did you come from?"

The boy met this query with a singular smile that revealed his white and well-shaped teeth.

"I've been drifting about all my life," said he.

"But you had a starting point."

"I guess Pagin should be blamed for me, poor fellow."

"Pagin?" echoed Major Mascot, losing color as if the name had a startling meaning for him.

"The man who was found in the water two months ago, and who set Captain Sam upon the trail of the League."

"And so Pagin set you to drifting, Gogol?"

"I guess so."

Mascot studied the boy with a faint smile.

"Was he your father?" he asked.

"I think not."

Another period of silence.

"You are not American born, Gogol?"

"I am not."

This the boy said with a positiveness almost emphatic.

"You look like—"

"Like what?" interrupted Gogol, almost springing forward and fastening his eyes upon the major.

"Why, like a Russian."

"Do I, indeed?" and Gogol showed his teeth again. "You have been among that people, then?"

"I've been everywhere," smiled Major Mascot.

"Pagin was a Russian. I happen to know that," said Gogol, "but that fact didn't keep him from the river. I believe it got him there."

"How?"

Major Mascot was trying to get at something important while he waited for Nelly's return.

"You know something about the Centipede League because you and Captain Sam are on good terms," resumed the boy. "Pagin was a marked man. He was in the way of the League."

"What is the League, Gogol?"

A singular expression came over the boy's face.

"You might ask me too much," said he. "I don't know Captain Sam's secrets. He keeps them to himself. I know, though, that the Centipede League of New York is a dark one; that its eyes are everywhere, and its sting, too. I've felt the latter myself."

"You, boy?"

"I've been caught three times."

"Where?"

"On the street twice, and once on the ferry-boat—the time Captain Sam saved my life by jumping overboard after me."

"Who caught you those three times—man or woman?"

"A man."

"The same one every time?"

"Yes. He must be the catcher for the Centipede."

"You must look out, Gogol. Do you know why they want you?"

"I was Pagin's friend. I know no other reason."

Major Mascot, leaning back in his chair, eyed the boy silently for several minutes.

"I don't want the League to entrap you," he finally said.

"I don't intend that it shall if I can help it."

The major smiled at the boy's display of determination.

"Keep your eyes open," he replied. "The League is dangerous."

"I won't sleep any more. I will watch the whole twenty-four hours."

"That is right."

Soon afterward Major Mascot's recollection went back to Nelly's story about the strange woman in the hallway.

"What did you see in this house the time you waited for my last message to Captain Sam?" he suddenly asked.

Gogol started, and glanced toward the curtain from which the woman's face had been reflected in the mirror.

"I saw a face in the glass," said he.

"A woman's face?"

"Yes."

"Where was she?"

"At the curtain yonder."

"It was not Nelly?"

"No. I have seen her enough to know that the face I saw that night was not hers."

"Did you ever see that face before?"

"Sometimes I have thought that I have," answered the boy slowly.

"Where?"

"I can't make out. It may have been in a dream; it is so indistinct."

"Was it a pretty face?" queried Major Mascot.

"As a tigress's face is, and I used to think that pretty at the shows."

Major Mascot smiled at the oddity of the comparison.

"Then, you can't say where you saw that spy's face before it was seen in this room?"

"I cannot."

"And you haven't seen it since?"

"No."

The man looked anxiously toward the door as he thought suddenly of the absent girl. Gogol, catching the glance, seemed to wonder what it meant.

"Gogol, do you ever taste wine?" he asked.

"I don't get to see much, sir," smiled the boy.

Major Mascot crossed the room and opened the elegant sideboard in the wall. Selecting a bottle he filled a wine-glass, and after a stealthy glance over his shoulder at Gogol, caught up a little vial that stood in one of the dark corners of the cupboard and dashed one-half of its contents into the liquor.

The following moment he placed the wine before the boy and saw him drink it off with a relish.

"You keep the best," smiled Gogol, his eyes sparkling for a second and then almost as quickly losing their light.

Major Mascot watched him eagerly as a strange drowsiness took possession of his senses, and in a little while Gogol lay back in the chair as solidly asleep as though he were one of the Seven Sleepers.

For a short time the millionaire major eyed the boy with triumphant curiosity. Then he left his chair and bent over him.

At first he shook Gogol and spoke to him as if to test the potency of the drug, but the boy was as a log in his hands.

Before proceeding further Major Mascot locked the doors leading from the room, and coming back from the last one again bent over Gogol.

His hands rather nervously opened the boy's coat, then his shirt, and exposed the flesh.

At first he saw nothing that seemed to pay him for his trouble, but pushing the garments still further back he saw something that enchained his attention.

This was a mark near Gogol's left shoulder—a tattoo so plain that it seemed to have been finished but the day before.

It was a hand strangling a serpent.

For some time Major Mascot looked at the mark, now smiling knowingly, and again looking perplexed and disturbed.

"Captain Sam never said anything about this," he murmured. "But then the Sphinx keeps his secrets. He may know nothing of it, but he is not the man to let anything escape him. Yes, Gogol, you are in the Centipede's shadow. The League's traps are still set for you and will be until all is lost or won."

He restored the boy's clothing and went back to his chair, but not long afterward left the room, leaving Gogol to himself.

Some time had passed when the boy opened his eyes. They had a singular look and he passed his hand several times across his forehead as if to convince himself that he was not asleep.

"What made me go to sleep so quickly?" exclaimed Gogol. "Was it the wine? Where is Major Mascot?"

He looked about the room but saw no one. He waited twenty minutes for the millionaire's return, but was not rewarded for his pains.

At last he picked up his hat and stole from the place. The door was not locked and Gogol found his way into the hall.

Turning the key in the front door as noiselessly as he could he glided from the house and halted for a second on the step outside.

Everywhere he saw the street-lamps, but between them were dark shadows.

He bounded from the step and ran away.

"If Captain Sam hasn't been home I'll look for him myself in spite of the Centipede. That man saved my life. I owe him life itself. They may set their traps for me, but the rat will keep his eyes open, and prove the most troublesome one they ever tried to trap."

Thus thought Gogol as he flitted from street to street, bringing up at last in front of a door which he unlocked.

The room was pervaded by a chill that seemed to pierce to his very marrow, and when Gogol struck a match he saw that the missing detective had not been at home.

CHAPTER XIV. THE HAND OF DEATH.

At the time of Major Mascot's interview with Gogol in the former's house the abode of Madame Gorgon, the fortune-telling witch, was being watched by a person who took more than a passing interest in the place.

This person was a woman, who stood in the shadow of a tree not far from the house, and on a spot which commanded a good view of it.

At last, as if satisfied that everything was as she wanted it, the watcher went up the steps and jerked the ball-knob.

Madame Gorgon opened the door in person,

took a look at her visitor, smiled to herself, and conducted her into the audience room.

At the same time a thin-faced child with large blue eyes and almost transparent lids reclined on a settee in an adjoining room.

This child was Mystérie, the mesmeric prodigy of the establishment.

She was not asleep, though apparently so, for when she heard Madame Gorgon open the door she raised her head and listened.

"I hope they won't need me," sighed the child, wearily. "I don't like these tests. They take my strength as it were, and I am still weak from the last trial."

She fell back on the settee and closed her eyes.

While she was in this condition the fortune-teller came in and tiptoed to where she lay.

Mystérie feigned sleep so well that she deceived Madame Gorgon, for, after a look at her, the fortune-teller went away—probably back to the visitor she had kept waiting.

But she had no sooner departed than Mystérie opened her eyes and smiled at the success of her ruse.

Madame Gorgon's visitor, as she sat in the audience-room, showed a pair of jet-black eyes full of beauty.

They were Judith's eyes, but the face was not hers. It was older than the face of the Centipede Queen, but none the less beautiful.

Madame Gorgon had looked searchingly at her visitor on admitting her, and when she left the parlor to steal, as we have seen, to Mystérie's side, she gave her a farewell glance.

The little girl, dreamless of the person who had come to the house, fell asleep on the cot.

It was the slumber of fatigue, a long, deep slumber and one that was not broken until the clocks of New York were striking twelve in their hundred towers.

When the child awoke the room felt cold. She shuddered and finally crept to the door.

A hanging lamp was burning in the hallway outside. She moved on in her slippers and found the parlor door ajar.

Opening it still further she entered and saw that a bluish blaze was all the light that hovered over the gas-jet.

It was enough, however, to show her the figure of Madame Gorgon asleep in an arm-chair standing almost directly under the light.

It was a strange place for the fortune-teller to sleep, the child thought.

Curiosity took her forward, but in front of Madame Gorgon she halted and seemed to stand riveted to the spot.

There was on Madame Gorgon's face a pallor different from the hue which denotes healthful sleep.

It sent an awful chill through the child's blood.

She caught the woman's hand, but dropped it even before she could call her by name.

The hand was as cold as a hand of ice would have been!

"My God! is Madame Gorgon dead?" cried Mystérie, and then she stood still, forced into silence by the spectacle before her.

It took the child some time to control herself.

She went forward again and looked into the face half buried in the chair.

There was no mistaking that dreadful hue.

Madame Gorgon had been dead some time; the features were set and rigid!

After a while Mystérie drew back with a shudder.

She had slept while the silent messenger was summoning Madame Gorgon away from this life. She had heard nothing of the struggle, if one there had been; she had been spared the fright it would have given her.

"I must go away now," thought Mystérie. "If I stay I might fall into the hands of another person of her class, and all my strength would be taken by the exacting tests. Madame Gorgon has been kind to me, if she was a witch. I don't know where to go; but I will find some place."

She went back to the room she had lately left. Taking a shawl from a dresser—she knew the night was damp without—she put it over her head, and drawing it so that hardly any of her face was visible she went and looked once more at the tenant of the chair, then tiptoeing it still, she glided to the door and let herself into the street.

The child was homeless, but this fact did not deter her.

She feared that, if she remained, she would become the slave of another fortune-teller, who would put her through the same ordeal to which Madame Gorgon had subjected her.

"I'll find shelter somewhere," she said to herself. "This is a great city and it can't be that every door in it will be shut against me."

If she could have foreseen the important part she was to play in the drama going on about her she might have changed her plans.

Looking up at the old house and bidding it a mute farewell, she started off.

Some distance away she picked up a bit of paper from the sidewalk and scribbling on it the words, "Madame Gorgon is dead in her own house," she dropped it into the first letter box she reached.

Then she hurried away once more.

The gaping streets soon swallowed the strange child, and she disappeared as effectually as if an earthquake had destroyed her.

"In the Lord's name, where did you come from?" exclaimed a woman who opened a door and found a little girl on the threshold.

"From the home I've had since I went away," was the reply, and in the warm room and the arms of the woman, Mystérie under a roof again lost consciousness.

When she awoke she could tell nothing of her flight from the house of the dead. That part of her life seemed a blank. She could say that she had been living with an old woman who had strange power over her; but beyond this nothing.

The next day a letter-carrier opened a mailbox on his route, and found in it a piece of paper which said that Madame Gorgon was dead in her own room.

As his route led past a police station he stopped long enough to hand the paper to the lieutenant in charge, and went on:

"Ho! that is the old witch!" exclaimed a young sergeant who came to the lieutenant's rescue, and a few minutes later an officer went up the steps of the old house and discovered the occupant of the chair.

"Heart disease!" ejaculated the officer. "Nothing taken; everything in its place. The fewer we have of these people the better," and he went away to report what he had seen.

The afternoon papers got hold of the item; dressed it up in a few lines, and dismissed it for something else.

"What became of the child? I'd like to know that," said a woman who belonged to the same profession which Madame Gorgon had honored during her lifetime. "Do you know, boy?"

"No, but I'd like to," was the answer.

The boy, who was Gogol, got a sharp, inquisitive look from the woman.

"What do you know about the child?"

"Not much," was the reply. "But I know Madame Gorgon had a companion of this sort. What do they say about the old woman's death?"

"She died of heart disease."

"Do they say that?"

"Yes."

Gogol made no reply, but looked away. The fortune-teller caught his look and instantly clutched his arm, her fingers sinking into his flesh like eagle talons.

"What! don't you think she died o' that?" she exclaimed.

"Did I say so?" was the quick retort.

"No, but—"

"I'll think what I please!" and Gogol broke from the grip in spite of its power, and was out of sight before the woman could renew it.

This scene took place almost in front of Madame Gorgon's house soon after the afternoon papers had acquainted the city with her death.

"It's strange—the whole thing is," mused Gogol when he found himself back in Silent Sam's quarters. "Here Captain Sam and Papa Sinton are missing and Madame Gorgon dead. The old woman was helping Sam on the trail, but whether with the little girl or not, I don't know. The whole thing looks dark to me; it looks connected, too. Why should the child go away? She had no other home. It's too deep for me; but some-how-or-other—I can't help it—I see the trail of the Centipede over all. If I could but find Captain Sam—if he would turn up, something might be solved. Where is my friend, the Shadow Sphinx."

Of course there was no answer to Gogol's cry. He went to the window and look down into the street as he had often done before.

The day was beginning to draw to a close.

Suddenly he saw the head and shoulders of a man on the sidewalk. They disappeared almost as soon as seen.

"That is the same head! I'd know it among a thousand, day or night!" exclaimed Gogol, and then he went to the door, slipped a bolt into its place, and took from beneath the pillow of the detective's cot a revolver.

"I've been in your clutches before—I know I have," said he, looking toward the door as he planted himself firmly in the middle of the room. "You can't even touch me this time. I don't propose to be the next victim of the Centipede. I am going to find Captain Sam, and escape from its traps. Why don't you come on and find Gogol prepared for battle?"

No sounds foretelling the nearness of an enemy greeted Gogol's ears, but for a long time he waited with the weapon in his hand and with defiance dancing in the depths of his fine black eyes.

The shadows getting longer proclaimed the departure of day.

Gogol at last gave up his vigils, restored the six-shooter beneath the pillow and quietly opened the door.

The stairway leading down to the street was already quite dark.

The boy leaned forward and looked down the flight.

"Ha! waiting like a cat for the mouse, eh?" he thought, and then slipping back he got possession of the revolver again.

Stealing back to the door he leaned out as be-

fore and saw the same crouching figure he had seen there at his first look.

"The compliments of Gogol!" he sent through his teeth as he raised the weapon and fired.

The shot was followed by a sharp cry, and something human in shape sprung up from the step and pitched headlong toward the pavement!

"That's the way to serve spies!" laughed the boy, shutting the door. "I am able to take care of myself if they give me half a chance. But I'd feel better if I could find Captain Sam."

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

AMONG those who caught sight of the brief paragraph announcing the death of Madame Gorgon, the fortune-teller, was Major Mascot, and the moment his eyes discovered the account, he uttered an exclamation of startling surprise.

"Dead?" he cried. "This is sudden and unfortunate. Captain Sam was using the witch of O—street, and the vein was yielding some ore. Dead! found dead in her chair by a police officer! There may be something dark about this."

Despite the fact that Nelly had not returned, Major Mascot left the house and brought up a short time afterward in front of the house lately occupied by Madame Gorgon.

It was a quiet and unhandsome neighborhood, largely frequented by women of her class, and when he went up the steps and rung the bell rung by so many dupes of the black art, he was confronted by a woman who seemed to have taken possession of the house.

Major Mascot was admitted, though the woman at the same time took particular pains to tell him of its former tenant's death.

He was also informed that in a room back of the parlor—the one formerly occupied by Mystérie, the mesmeric prodigy—lay the body of Madame Gorgon, arranged for burial.

"What has become of the child?" asked the major.

"That's what nobody knows," was the reply. "The girl is worth her weight in gold to some one of our profession."

Major Mascot looked sharply at the woman.

"Are you a fortune-teller, also?"

"I am," was the smiling reply. "There are things in this house that should not be seen by the uninitiated, and that is why I am here."

The reply satisfied Major Mascot.

"Do you think the child has been taken off?" he questioned.

"I hardly know what to say. She may have wandered away on her own account, after discovering that her mistress was dead. Did you ever see her?"

"The child?"

"Yes."

Major Mascot shook his head.

"But you have heard of her wonderful powers?"

"Yes. Where did Madame Gorgon get her?"

"That is one of the secrets that perished with her."

"Is the child's performance genuine?"

"It is. But she must be in the hands of a person who possesses the controlling power," was the answer.

"Madame Gorgon possessed it, eh?"

"To a wonderful degree; but she used her power sparingly. She saw that each demand on the child took a bit from her life, and she pitied the little thing even while she worked with her."

"Do you think you could handle the child, if found?"

"I am sure I could," replied the woman quickly and with a good deal of assurance. "Do you think you know where she is?"

Major Mascot was compelled to shake his head while he answered.

"Is there no other person in New York who can track people in a sleep, like Mystérie?"

"There are some who pretend they can; but the child, so far as I know, is the sole possessor of that marvelous gift. Find her and we may know something of Madame Gorgon's last movements."

"If she can be found at all it shall be done!" exclaimed Major Mascot. "Give me your address, I may need your services before long."

In another moment he held in his hand a card reading:

"MADAME LEO, *Clairvoyant*,

No. 999 B—Street."

and having put it away, he expressed a desire to look at the dead.

He was conducted into a darkened room, but when Madame Leo drew the curtains aside there fell across a sheeted figure a long ray of sunlight.

The woman's hand pulled down the shroud and the nabob stood and looked into the cold face of Madame Gorgon.

"Heart disease, didn't they say?" he whispered, with a glance at his companion.

Madame Leo nodded.

"That's what surprised me," continued the woman. "I had known Madame Gorgon for years; she had no confidante, but I was as near

to her as anybody. Never heard her say anything about heart trouble. It's the old verdict when death comes mysteriously. Heart disease! It lets the doctors out of many a puzzle. Now you see why we ought to find the child."

Major Mascot nodded approvingly.

He stood awhile longer at the head of the bier, and then made a sign for Madame Leo to lower the sheet, which was done, and he walked with her back into the room where the body had been found.

"Madame Leo," said he, "the hunt for Mystérie begins at once."

"I'm glad of that. I will aid you all in my power. Are you going to appeal to the police?"

"To the best bloodhound in Gotham when I find him!" exclaimed Major Mascot.

"Make no mistake," said the fortune-teller.

"I am very anxious to have the child trace out the last moments of the woman in your room."

"Do you disagree with the doctors, madame?"

"I have not said so," smiled Madame Leo, and this being all the satisfaction he could get from her, Major Mascot bade her good-afternoon and went away.

When he returned home he found Nelly there.

"Did I frighten you by my absence?" asked the beautiful girl.

"I was disturbed," said he. "The wording of your note was uncertain. It left me in doubt; it was so unexpected."

"I have been in strange places," answered Nelly. "I went away hurriedly. A letter took me."

"A letter?" echoed Major Mascot.

"I thought I was doing you a service—"

"Me?"

"You."

"I don't understand you, child."

Nelly's face was pale and wore a half-frightened look.

"The mysterious woman—the one I saw in the hall the other night—is connected with the scheme."

"Then the letter was a decoy?" cried Mascot.

"I can call it nothing else."

"Where is it?"

"The girl put her hand into her bosom, but fell back with an exclamation of astonishment."

"I put it there when I went off," cried she, "but it is not with me now. I have lost the letter!"

"What did it say? You master things very easily, Nelly."

"I can't repeat the exact words, though they were not many. I was told to meet at the corner a certain party who would enlighten me on a subject nearest my heart, and, as you know, the strange woman has been the companion of my thoughts ever since I saw her. Perhaps I should have paid no attention to the message; but curiosity got the better of my judgment and I went. At the corner I found a man whose face was so muffled by a high collar as to be invisible. A carriage stood a few feet away. 'I am the person who has been waiting for you, Miss Nelly,' said he, taking my arm. I was conducted to the carriage in a state of strange bewilderment. It seemed to me that I could not speak, and I did not recover until the carriage, which was tightly closed, was rattling through the streets of New York."

"By-and-by we stopped," continued Nelly, taking a long breath. "I was helped out and led into a large house. For a few moments I was left alone in a fine room and when the door opened I was confronted by a man whose face was masked. He was the possessor of a splendid figure, though his hands, which were ungloved, told me that he was no longer very young. He took a chair at the table that stood in the center of the room and eyed me closely several minutes. I did not speak; the spell of some mystery seemed to have taken that power from me. Presently he rung and a man appeared. 'Some wine for the lady,' said he, and a glass of rich vintage which looked very tempting was placed before me."

"I refused to drink, whereat the man in the mask laughed and asked if I thought poison lurked in the wine. I still refused to taste it, and he did not insist. After awhile—having given me another long and steadfast look—he began to talk. I cannot tell you all he said. Much of it is a mystery to me. Among other things he asked me if I loved you, if I was content with my lot, if, in case of your death—and he stopped right here, to say that life was uncertain—I would not want a husband who could protect me from the machinations of evil people."

"Did he say that, Nelly?" cried Major Mascot.

"He did."

"Go on."

Major Mascot's face was without a vestige of color; his lips even were bloodless.

"For more than an hour the Unknown talked to me. He seemed to know all about you; but every now and then he came back to the uncertainty of life, and of the anxiety he had—or appeared to have—for my welfare. During our interview there was no one else in the room, but

once I thought I caught the sound of some one on the staircase in the hall just beyond. Instantly the strange woman whom I had seen under this roof flashed across my mind. He appeared to have heard the same noise for he sent a glance toward the door, but soon returned to me.

"I was kept a prisoner in that house for hours. I fell asleep as if overcome by an irresistible power and slept a long time. By and by the man who had escorted me to the house came and conducted me to a carriage in the street back of the place. He provided me with a veil so thick that I could see nothing of my surroundings, and when I was set down at the same corner where I first took the vehicle, I saw him drive away at breakneck speed."

Major Mascot said nothing for a moment after the conclusion of Nelly's strange narrative.

"The boldest piece of business I ever heard of!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"And the most mysterious," added the girl.

"There's a scheming hand in all this—a hand playing for desperate stakes."

"It seems so to me. But who can the masked man be? He seemed to know all your past—"

Major Mascot's start broke Nelly's sentence.

"The deuce take him, whoever he is!" he cried.

"You must obey no more messages—take no more risks. They are dangerous."

"I was foolish for doing as I have done. Forgive me," and Nelly bent forward and touched Major Mascot's forehead with her lips.

Five minutes he was the sole occupant of the room.

"The Centipede is still at work!" he exclaimed. "Nelly was in one of the reptile's webs for a while. She saw the man who is at the head of the plot; she heard the rustle of the female spider's garments. He told her that life is uncertain because the sting has been sharpened for me. I know that. Madame Gorgon is dead, and the child with the marvelous gift is missing. Has she fallen into the hands of the League? I must find Silent Sam. He must turn up to keep me on this new mystery. I can't fight the Centipede without his coolness and cunning. But what if the sting has found him? My God! I dare not think of that!" and Major Mascot strode to his sideboard and steadied his nerves with a glass of liquor.

CHAPTER XVI.

MASCOT MAKES THE DEAD "TALK."

"If Nelly had been permitted to see everything along her route to the house to which the muffled man conducted her, I might pick up a clew without quitting my own house," continued Major Mascot, closing the sideboard and coming back to the table. "The affair was well worked; the scoundrels counted on the girl's curiosity and she fell into the snare. But why seek to tell her what the masked man in the elegant house told her? The League is playing a mysterious hand, one essentially its own. It knows what it is about."

Major Mascot, looking from the window, saw that the short day had departed, and that the mantle of night was once more descending upon the city.

As he parted the curtains to enable him to make a note of this, a figure flitted past the window, but not quick enough to escape the millionaire's eye.

"A spy!" thought the major. "Am I under surveillance by the League? By heavens! I will show it that I am dangerous!" And taking a revolver from a handy drawer, he rushed into the hallway and opening the door, looked in vain for some one who might be regarded suspicious.

His failure did not change his opinion of the situation. The figure he had seen was that of an eavesdropper—a spy, and of course, a spy of the Centipede League.

He stood a few moments on his doorstep, watchful and thinking, and then went back into the house with the weapon still gripped in his hand.

Ten minutes afterward he stole forth again, quitting the house entirely, and going away with rapid and eager strides.

He turned up not long after his departure at Silent Sam's door, but there was no response to his knock.

Major Mascot could not keep his thoughts from audible utterance.

"Not yet!" he exclaimed. "Something dark has taken place. No detective, no Gogol. A trap of some kind has been sprung. The League has played some infamous card, and it has won!"

When he went down the stair to the street it was with a thought of Papa Sinton in his mind.

He recalled his adventure along with the Shadow Sphinx on the steps leading to the old man's abode, when Silent Sam threw the prowling spy to the bottom of the stairs at the risk of breaking his neck.

He did not know that Papa Sinton was Silent Sam's father, though he suspected that such was the case, and he thought a visit to the old gentleman might throw some light upon the detective's unexplained absence.

Major Mascot found the house and mounted the steps.

He passed to the door of Papa Sinton's room and knocked.

No answer.

"The same mystery," he exclaimed. "Am I left to fight the Centipede alone?"

He went slowly and thoughtfully back to the sidewalk again.

"The trail seems utterly lost," he resumed.

"If something dark has not happened to Silent Sam, why can't I find him?"

This question, never answered, was always confronting him. It tormented him with increasing persistence the longer he thought about it. It seemed to him that he had exhausted his efforts to find the missing detective.

Than his quarters and Papa Sinton's house he knew not where else to look.

Passing down the street after emerging from the scene of his last failure, Major Mascot bent his head to the wind that blew great drops of rain in his eyes, and traveled square after square.

He was followed but he knew it not.

The man who was watching him carried one hand in his coat pocket exactly as a former spy had done when on the same person's track.

He kept close enough to Major Mascot to see his every movement, and all the time he watched him like a hawk.

Now and then the nabob would look up and momentarily take a survey of the buildings, as if to note their numbers, and the trailer would smile to see him do this.

All at once Major Mascot wheeled and came back.

"Gods! doubling, is he?" ejaculated the human fox whipping into a doorway, where he immediately became a statue.

The following moment the patter of Mascot's feet came along the rain-kissed pavement. The man in the door waited with a smile lurking on his lips as if he was sure of carrying out the object he had in view, no matter what the major might do.

In a little while Mascot had passed the spy and was followed as before.

He could no more escape the shadow than he could take unto himself wings and fly away.

Major Mascot had changed his course like a person suddenly discovering that he had been pursuing a wrong one and is eager to rectify the error before it is too late.

He led his tracker a long chase before he halted, and when he did so, he had reached the neighborhood of the wharves.

It was a strange spot for Major Mascot, and the man at his heels evidently thought so from his looks.

The protector of Nelly looked up at the front of an old frame house of two stories.

"I haven't been here for months," said he to himself.

"The party may be dead. I wouldn't be here now if I wasn't forced by circumstances to be my own detective. I can't be mistaken in the house. I never saw it in the daytime, but this part of the city never changes."

He seemed to know that the house had no bell, for, instead of hunting for a knob, he put his hand on the door and pushed it open.

"Who's there?" asked a voice from the darkness overhead, as Major Mascot's feet sounded in the hall.

"That's not his voice," flashed across the man's brain. "I'll have all my work for nothing if I find that he has vanished."

"It is a visitor," he said, in reply to the query.

"Wait."

The next moment footsteps came pattering down a flight of steps he could not see, and then a match was struck.

As the tiny blaze leaped up, Major Mascot looked into the bright black eyes and the wrinkled face of a crone which had the leathery appearance of a mummy's.

"I don't know you," whined the hag. "Who may you be?"

"A friend of Captain Totem's," answered the major.

The woman fell back, showing a few yellow snags by a laugh which seemed to render her uglier than ever.

"Captain Totem!" she echoed. "What! don't you know? Where have you been all this time?"

"Why?"

"Surely you haven't been in the city."

"What do you mean?"

"What could I mean but that he is dead?"

"Dead!" echoed Major Mascot.

"Dead!" repeated the old crone. "Dead and dust. You couldn't find him with a search-warrant, ha, ha!"

Her laugh sounded devilish at that time and place; her looks suggested a witch from "Macbeth."

"When did he die?" asked Major Mascot.

"A year ago."

"Of what?"

"That's what puzzled some people," was the reply. "We found him dead in his room."

Major Mascot could not repress a start.

"Was there an investigation?"

"No. They didn't think enough of Captain Totem to honor him with one. Friend of yours, eh?"

"I knew him," said the nabob, evasively.

"What became of his papers?"

"I never found any."

"Did you look?"

"Not particularly."

"Who has his room now?"

"I have."

"Would you let me see it?"

At the same time Major Mascot dropped one hand into his pocket and jingled some coins, at sound of which the crone's eyes got an avaricious sparkle.

"Come along!" cried she, throwing down her second match and leading the way up-stairs.

The next moment another figure slipped into the hall by the door.

It lost itself in the darkness there, but listened to the footsteps that ascended to the floor overhead.

Major Mascot was conducted into a cramped chamber that looked down into the back yard attached to the premises.

"Look where you please. I'll trust you here for you look like a gentleman," said the old woman, and with her last word she left the major to himself in the little room.

"Dead a year!" he exclaimed, taking in the room with another look. "If he destroyed nothing and kept his word, I may make the dead speak."

He crossed to one corner of the room where stood a dirty washstand which he picked up and set elsewhere on the floor.

Then he stooped in the corner and finally got down on his hands and knees, with an open pen-knife in his grip.

Inserting the blade into a crack there he pried up a square block of wood so deftly set in the floor that the sharpest eye would have missed it.

The piece thus removed was not larger than his hand.

Having accomplished this he inserted his hand and drew forth a package tied with a piece of twine.

"The dead talks!" chuckled Major Mascot as he hid the package in his bosom after one satisfied and gleaming glance. "Captain Totem isn't as dead as the old hag makes him out. I wouldn't make a bad detective with a little practice. My trail has already yielded something."

He rose, brushed the dirt from his knees and set the table back. He did not look any further, and his face wore a victorious smile when the crone returned.

Major Mascot handed her a lot of money which her skeleton fingers closed on with miserly avidity, then he drew his coat tightly over his breast, buttoning it to the chin, and bade her good-night.

"I'd like to go home with the speed of a dispatch!" he exclaimed. "Captain Totem kept his word—kept it contrary to expectation, and I have the manuscript."

He passed so close to a dark figure in the hall that he could have touched it; he bounded out into the street, and did not stop until he threw himself into the chair that stood at the table in his library.

Then he tore open his coat, jerked the packet from his bosom, wrenched the wrapping loose and opening the manuscript read aloud in tones of mad triumph:

"The story of a crime! Told by 'Captain Totem.'"

Major Mascot paused and laughed.

CHAPTER XVII.

RATS IN A TRAP.

LET US now turn to the fortunes of the Shadow Sphinx.

The reader, we are sure, has not forgotten Silent Sam's visit to the house of the lost number, which proved to be a dark and dangerous trap.

His encounter with Duval, the centipede-maker, the struggle in the hall, the fall headlong into the workshop and the sudden opening of the floor, are incidents that must still be fresh in the reader's mind.

Silent Sam dropped through the opening with the velocity of a falling bullet.

He struck heavily on what seemed a solid stone floor, for consciousness immediately left him and he knew nothing more.

How long he lay in this state he did not know. When he came out of the swoon he had a confused ringing in his head, and intense darkness seemed his sole companion.

He put out his hands but they touched nothing; but he soon rose and went forward, until he brought up against a wall so smooth that his fingers conveyed to his brain the thought that he had encountered glass.

Not a sound came to his ears.

Duval's hammer had ceased its tappings, or, if at work, the sounds failed to reach him.

The New York detective had first assured himself that the descent into the pit had resulted in no broken limbs. In this respect his escape had been most fortunate. He remembered having dropped feet foremost; if he had fallen head-first he might have even then a broken neck,

The pit appeared to be almost circular in construction. Its walls were smooth, and there was no outlet of any kind.

"This is a death-trap and no mistake," said the Shadow Sphinx to himself. "Duval knew he had me the moment he reached the cord, and he improved the opportunity."

"My God! who is here with me?" asked a voice that sent a thrill through the detective's frame.

In an instant Silent Sam's heart seemed to stand still.

He was not alone in the pit.

"Who have I for a companion in misfortune?" he inquired.

"A victim of the trap."

The following moment two persons encountered in the darkness.

"Father!" exclaimed Silent Sam.

"My son!"

There was a pressure of hands and a brief story by the old man thus encountered by the detective.

"I have been here a long time," said Papa Sinton. "I was thrown upon the floor above us by the masked man, who glided like a tiger into the room to which I had been conducted by the man with the leather apron, and the next instant the floor parted and I fell into this place, fortunately escaping with my life, though painfully injured."

"What brought you to the house?"

"Overpowering curiosity," answered the old man. "I have known Duval for one of the most ingenious men in New York. He can make anything. He is in terrible business now."

"What is the nature of it?"

Silent Sam felt his hand pressed.

"He is making deadly reptiles," was whispered at his ear. "His ingenuity counterfeits the centipede, but he does not supply his toy with its death fluid. Those for whom he makes them do this. The masked man must be one of them."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know. He has a commanding figure, and is as strong as a lion. I am pretty strong for one of my years; but I found myself a child in his hands. I am convinced that he must be Duval's employer."

"Who is Duval? What is his real name?"

"The man has had several names," was the reply. "He doffs one and takes another whenever it suits him to do so. He is Duval now; simply Duval."

Silent Sam wondered whether his father suspected the existence of the Centipede League.

"Duval makes his centipedes for a purpose," suddenly resumed the old man. "I have found none of them on the market, which proves to me that some person takes all he makes. The process of manufacture is slow. Duval perfects everything as he goes along. There must be a Centipede League somewhere."

The detective started.

"If there is no such thing in existence what becomes of the mechanical reptiles Duval turns out?" resumed Papa Sinton.

Silent Sam took his father's arm in his grip.

"I'll keep it from you no longer," said he, in low tones. "There is in this city a Centipede League, and I am here because I have been on its track."

A slight exclamation was the response.

"I have thought so since falling into this dungeon-trap."

"I am the enemy of this League—the foe it really fears," continued Silent Sam. "I felt that I was entering the grasp of the Centipede when I came to the old house in search of you, my father. The moment I fell headlong into Duval's workshop I knew I had found the birth-place of the reptile. The wonderful child did not track you wrongly under Madame Gorgon's spell."

"The wonderful child, do you say?" was echoed in the dark.

"Mysterie. But let us forget her for the present. We want to quit the trap."

"Ay, if we can!" exclaimed Papa Sinton.

"I have examined every inch of wall and floor a thousand times. There is absolutely no outlet. We have descended into a veritable death pit. What has become of the hammer? I haven't heard it for a long time?"

"Not since my descent, eh?"

"Not since then, at least."

"Was it busy before?"

"It was never still. Duval is an industrious fellow; centipede making does not lag on his hands."

"But we don't hear the hammer now."

"No, it has ceased its pecking."

Some hours followed Silent Sam's fall into the dungeon.

Not a sound came to his ears from above.

"What is the height of the walls?" he asked.

"I don't know. I have been unable to solve the question with my hands."

"Make a ladder of me," suggested the detective. "Get upon my shoulders and see if you can't touch the ceiling."

Papa Sinton chuckled audibly at this idea.

The next minute Silent Sam braced himself near the wall and his father ascended to his shoulders with the nimbleness of an acrobat.

"I have found the ceiling," came down from above.

"Good! I am going to carry you across the dungeon. Follow the ceiling with your hands. We may discover where the floor parts."

Supporting his parent on his strong shoulders, the Shadow Sphinx moved across the floor.

On the other side he stopped and Papa Sinton leaped down from his perch.

"I found a great bolt in the center of the ceiling," were his first words.

"It keeps the floor in its place!" exclaimed the detective.

"I could not move it. To do so one must pull the cord in the workshop. And we are not there."

"Did you hear any noise that would indicate that the house is any longer inhabited?"

"Not a sound."

"And caught the glimmer of no light?"

"Not a ray."

"Could you carry me across the room on your shoulders?"

"Yes."

The detective soon found himself upon his father's shoulders, and guided by his hands on the ceiling was carried across the dungeon:

All at once he stopped.

He had found the iron bolt.

Holding his breath for a moment, he struck a match and held it above his head.

The light showed him the dimensions of the piece of iron which, when firm in its socket, held the two sections of floor together.

Silent Sam tried to shove back the bolt, but it would not move.

He threw down his match and worked as hard as his insecure footing would allow; but his toil went for nothing.

He was exasperated when he stood again on the stone floor telling his father all about his discovery.

"It is the only way to freedom," said the old man.

"The only way," echoed Sam, rather dolefully. "The boards overhead are as hard as stone, and I have nothing but a pocket-knife."

There was no answer.

"I heard nothing of Duval and his hammer," resumed Sam. "They are strangely silent."

"Maybe the slave has gone to report to his master."

"The man in the mask?"

"Yes."

"But would he be away so long? Hours have passed since I dropped into this Cimmerian hell. Another day has come."

"Doubtless. It seems to me that I have been here a year. My tongue is swollen, and hunger nearly drives me mad."

"We must attack the ceiling."

"With your knife?"

"We have nothing better."

"If the blade breaks, what!"

"Then, like rats, we must gnaw our way out."

After a rest, Silent Sam again mounted to his father's shoulders, and was borne to the spot from which he could feel the bolt along the ceiling.

Papa Sinton planted himself on the floor with the solidity of a modern Atlas, and the detective went to work with his knife.

His plan was to cut around the heavy iron staple that received the bolt, in hopes that, having loosened it, he might push back the bolt itself and open the floor.

The position was a trying one. His father could not hold him long, and there would have to be long rests and little real work.

The Shadow Sphinx of Gotham had never been in such a trap before.

He found that the knife at first made but little impression on the ceiling, still he did not despair.

"I wonder how Gogol takes my absence?" he thought. "And I wonder, too, what Major Mascot thinks?"

These thoughts seemed to lend new vim to his efforts.

He cut away with all his might, the little particles of wood falling upon his parent, filling the old man's heart with hope.

Thus engaged in a hard struggle for liberty, Silent Sam had more hours pass over his head.

Startling events occurred in the drama elsewhere.

Madame Gorgon had died suddenly and mysteriously in the parlor of her house of secrets, Gogol was having some strange adventures, Major Mascot was playing his part in the procession of events; the Centipede was playing its hand—sharpening its death-sting for other victims.

The Shadow Sphinx worked as if he had a knowledge of these things to goad him on. He was sometimes relieved by his father who cut away at the ceiling with the son's ambition, and as if he had renewed his strength by some magic means.

"I shall stay until I finish the job!" ejaculated the detective as he mounted his human perch.

"This turn decides the game."

He attacked the floor with all his strength.

The staple that held the bolt was loose; it shook in the ceiling which had been cut nearly through.

All at once Silent Sam's blade broke through the thin partition that separated him from the room overhead. He rapidly cut away the intervening piece and then grasped the staple.

With all his strength he gave it a wrench; it came away with his hand, and the next instant he was struck a terrible blow in the face and fell stunned to the floor.

"We have won!" cried Papa Sinton. "The floor has opened!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK ON THE OLD TRAIL.

It was true!

The displacement of the iron staple had freed the bolt which held the trap-door in place, and it was a portion of the floor which had thrown the detective from his parent's shoulders.

Silent Sam looked up and saw the change.

A vague light came down into the dungeon.

"Brace yourself just once more, father," Sam exclaimed. "We must follow up our success."

The old man was glad to obey, and the following moment the Shadow Sphinx had clambered eagerly into the room overhead.

"The bird has flown!" he cried. "You must come up here and see for yourself."

Father and son soon stood side by side in what had once been Duval's workshop, but now no traces of the manufacture of centipedes remained.

The bench still stood against the wall, but it and the tool-racks had vanished, and the cord which Duval had pulled with such fatality to the detective's fortunes had been cut close to the ceiling.

The two men looked speechless at the scene that confronted them.

"A complete vanishment," smiled Sam at last. "I never saw anything like it."

"Duval has merely moved to other quarters," was the reply. "The making of centipedes has not stopped."

"Of course not. The League will now proceed to reap the results of its victory."

It was soon ascertained that night had again settled over the face of the city, and father and son proceeded to desert the house.

They effected their exit by the rear door and stole away to appease their hunger.

"I must play in the dark for a time," said Silent Sam, during the conversation that accompanied the progress of the meal. "You must not go back to the old quarters, and I must keep away from mine."

"But Gogol?"

"If the boy has not fallen into the hands of the League, I will see that he is protected."

"You will reveal yourself to him?"

"If I find it necessary," nodded the detective.

They were still at the table when a figure that had a noiseless stride as if the feet were incased in rubbers, entered the house of the lost number from the alley front.

It went to the door of Duval's workshop, viewed the place by means of a match and then retired apparently satisfied.

Going to a back room the man piled a lot of fine wood and shavings against the wall, saturated the whole with some kerosene found in a closet and then laid a train which he fired just before turning away. He then left the house, locking the door behind him and was lost to view on the street.

Ten minutes after his departure the whole interior of the dark house seemed to be a mass of seething flames. By the time the fire burst from the windows it was uncontrollable, and in a short time the old tinder-box, with its nearest neighbor, was doomed.

An hour later a pile of ruins marked the location of Duval's workshop, and a man who stood among the spectators—a well-built man with his hat rim drawn over his eyes—walked off with a satisfied smile.

The job had been well done, and so satisfied was the perpetrator that he did not once look back in silent doubt.

Silent Sam took his father to a part of the city distant many squares from his late residence. He found for him a little boarding-house wherein one could lose one's identity as long as one pleased to do so.

"Make no mistake," admonished the old man in parting with his son. "You are single-handed against the League."

"I don't fear the odds," was the answer, and Papa Sinton with a look of pride saw the Shadow Sphinx glide into the street.

"Gogol's whereabouts first, but the child shall trail him," said he, and then he betook himself straight to the house occupied so long by Madame Gorgon.

The man who approached the building a few minutes later did not look much like the bloodhound of Gotham.

The lynx-eyed spies of the League would not have suspected him.

He stopped suddenly on the steps of the house.

A board hung alongside of the door, and though the nearest lamp was on the corner, Silent Sam could read the words: "FOR RENT" that seemed to stare into his face.

He fell back from the legend with an exclamation of surprise.

"She's dead, sir," said a voice from the sidewalk, and the detective, looking down over his shoulder, saw a boy who reminded him of the one he had picked up in the alley where Duval's workshop was.

He left the door and went down to the boy.

"What! is Madame Gorgon dead?" he asked.

"Dead and buried."

Sam's look became a stare of astonishment.

"Who is in there now?"

"No one."

"What became—"

He was going to ask about Mysterie, but suddenly recollected that the child's existence was a secret which very few people shared with one another, and he did not complete the sentence.

"She was found dead in her chair in that room," continued the boy, pointing to one of the closed windows.

"Found dead!" echoed the detective.

"Yes."

"Who found her?"

"A policeman. Another woman of her sort is going to occupy the house. She took it just at dark, though somehow or other the sign hasn't been taken down."

Silent Sam walked off with some singular thoughts on his mind.

Madame Gorgon dead and Mysterie missing!

Here was another complication he did not like.

"I can't get at Gogol's whereabouts through mesmerism," mused he, shaking his head. "The dead won't talk, and Madame Gorgon was the only living person who knew how to handle the child. Mascot of course knows nothing. I won't go to him—not now, at least."

Another hour passed away.

It was now late, and the figure of the detective slipped into the hallway and went up the steps that led to his old quarters.

He listened at the door, but everything was quiet beyond.

After awhile he put a key into the lock and turned it softly.

He pushed the door open and stole inside on tiptoe. Knowing where his bed was he approached it and bent over it.

It was unoccupied. Gogol was not at home.

The detective's next move was to blanket the window, after which he turned on the gas and tried to make out when the boy had been there last.

He found several evidences of occupation at some time, but they were not strong enough to let him draw a definite conclusion.

"I must find the boy or know something about him!" exclaimed Sam. "He is very important to me. I have sworn to look after him. He is in the shadow of the League—has been ever since it got down to work in New York, and I can't desert Gogol now. He would die for 'Captain Sam' as he calls me; I must stand by Gogol."

The Shadow Sphinx went out as noiselessly as he had come to the place; he left behind no traces of his visit, and disappearing among the shadows on the pave below, was soon lost to view.

He turned up near Major Mascot's house a short time afterward, but did not seek admission.

He looked at the building awhile as if waiting for some one to emerge from it, and finally slipped away unseen.

As he turned a corner within a few blocks of the nabob's abode he was passed by a figure which he eyed sharply for a moment and then followed, quickening his gait suddenly.

The tracked figure was a woman.

The head was so muffled that the detective could not catch the slightest glimpse of the face, but he kept the figure in view and seemed in his element once more.

Once or twice the woman looked back—a sweeping glance up the street and over her shoulders, and Silent Sam caught for a moment the gleam of a pair of bright eyes that seemed to seek him from behind their wealth of silken lashes.

"I guess my identity is safe even from you," he murmured in response to these looks.

"Whither are you going to lead me, Judith? To the captain? No; you are turning away from him now."

The woman having turned a certain corner at that moment led the detective into another street, and a few rods away she ran up a flight of steps, jerked a knocker, was admitted almost immediately and vanished.

Silent Sam stopped short at this display of tactics.

He looked at the house and then more particularly at the closed door.

"Is it the new nest, or are the cards arranged there?" he asked himself. "What new devilry is afoot now?"

He approached the house—a very plain one for that part of New York—and made out the number on the door.

He jotted it down mentally and walked on.

There stood in front of the place along the curbing several trees, and as Silent Sam reached the last one something moved round the body.

It was as quick as a chipmunk, but not quick enough to escape the detective's eye.

The figure was small and boyish in outline, and the Shadow Sphinx, eager to see more of it, crushed his hat over his eyes and darted toward the tree.

He made a grab for the figure as it tried to whisk itself away, and closing on the arm, drew it toward him.

"The fourth time, but by Jupiter you sha'n't hold me!" exclaimed a voice, and the boy jerked back with all his might, nearly throwing the ferret into the gutter.

But Silent Sam's hold was not broken though sorely tried, and as the short tussle had disarranged his hat he found the boy staring into his face unable to articulate a word from astonishment.

"Come along!" commanded Sam in cautious tones. "You've watched here long enough to have some news," and the next moment he marched off with the boy who had not yet found his tongue.

The Shadow Sphinx had most unexpectedly found Gogol.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT GOGOL FOUND.

"WHAT do you know? who inhabits that house?" asked the detective, when he had taken Gogol to a place where they could talk without fear of spies.

The boy had by this time recovered from his surprise.

"I know that somebody took possession of the house since dark," he replied, showing his teeth in a grin.

"Somebody" is not very definite. You must do better than that, Gogol. Man or woman?"

"A man."

"But you saw who went in awhile ago, for you were watching from the tree."

"I saw her, and if you had not come along I would be there now, waiting for her to come out. The League has been at my heels, off and on, since I last saw you, Captain Sam."

"But you have eluded it, eh, Gogol?"

"I've been too sharp for it!" chuckled the boy.

"Once I had to use powder."

"How?"

"I winged one of them on the stairs."

After a moment's pause the detective continued:

"What was the man like who took possession of the house back yonder?"

"He was well built, a little stooped, and had a bushy beard. His eyes I could not see for the hat that had been pulled over them."

"It must be Duval! The description fits him," thought Silent Sam. "How came you to watch him, Gogol?"

"I was watching a man who looked like the fellow who pushed me into the river the night you plunged in and rescued me. I am sure he was the same man, and he, you know, belongs to the League. I had my eye on him without his knowledge, when along came this stoop-shouldered, brown-bearded man, carrying a fat valise. The two exchanged nods, which I caught from where I stood, and the next minute I was after the last man. I tracked him to that house. A boy whom I picked up in the vicinity told me that it has been idle for weeks, but that a man furnished it to-day and was to take possession to-night. So you see," continued Gogol, with a laugh, "that I have not done so badly after all."

"How many visitors has the man had since he came?" asked Sam.

"No one but the woman."

"You did not know her?"

Gogol shook his head.

"I have more news!" he suddenly exclaimed, brightening while he looked into the detective's face. "Madame Gorgon, the black-art witch, is dead."

Silent Sam looked surprised, though, as we already know, Gogol's announcement was not news to him.

"It can't be, boy," he exclaimed.

"Dead she is—found so in her chair, and the wonderful child she used—Mysterie they called her—is missing. We can't go to the old woman for aid any more."

"What killed Madame Gorgon?" queried Sam.

"Heart disease, the doctors say," was the reply.

"But you differ with the doctors, Gogol."

"I?" exclaimed the boy.

"Yes," said the detective, looking steadily at him.

"I don't see why Madame Gorgon should die from heart disease just when she did," returned Gogol slowly. "The woman was dangerous to the Centipede."

"How dangerous?"

"She knew something."

"Come, boy; you are getting to be mysterious."

Before he answered Gogol bounded across the little back room which the two occupied and pulled the curtain aside. The window was not shuttered, and he could look into a narrow alley-like place which was dark.

"What did you hear?" asked Silent Sam.

"A spy I thought," replied the boy coming

back. "It may have been some one passing. I have been tracked by the Centipede so much that my ears are better than a fox's. I don't want to be mysterious to you, Captain Sam," and Gogol resumed his stool though he watched the window like a hawk. "Yes, Madame Gorgon knew something that the League wanted nobody on this side of the ocean to know."

"What did she know?"

The boy buried one hand in his bosom, and produced a small packet which he put into the Shadow Sphinx's hand.

"I found that," said he, looking up from the packet with a smile.

"Where did you find such things?"

"I found that one in Madame Gorgon's house."

"Since her death?"

"Since her death."

"Who occupies the house?"

"No one as yet, but Madame Leo is coming. I got into the house by the back way and did as I pleased for an hour."

"What were you looking for, Gogol?"

"For something about Pagin."

"The man whose death started me on this strange trail?"

"Yes; Pagin the Russian."

Silent Sam looked at the packet which was flat and tied with a piece of heavy tape.

"Pagin who was my protector knew Madame Gorgon. He went often to the old witch's house, and he once told me—in one of his confidential moods, which did not come over him very often—that he knew her when she didn't have to dupe people for a living, and that if she would tell the truth before she died somebody would drop their feathers. With these words of Pagin in my mind, I went to Madame Gorgon's to see if she didn't leave behind a record of some sort and I found that packet. It is written in Russian—"

"Which is Greek to me," interrupted the detective.

"But not to me," smiled the boy. "Pagin was Russian and he taught me."

"Then you must translate the paper."

"Yes, but not here!" exclaimed Gogol. "Not here with footsteps at the window every now and then."

"Neither in the old room," replied Silent Sam. "For the present I am dead to the Centipede League of Gotham. I am still in the dungeon beneath Duval's workshop."

With another look at the packet, which his fingers itched to open, the detective placed it in his bosom and buttoned his coat over it.

The two soon afterward left the place one at a time and vanished in different directions.

The night was dark and the lamps seemed to give but little light.

Silent Sam, with the secret paper nestling behind his closely-buttoned coat, felt that he had unexpectedly obtained a weapon against the Centipede League.

"Gogol is worth his weight in gold," he said to himself. "The boy is not the person to translate the paper for me. It may contain a secret which he should not know. I must keep a certain thing from him to the last—that is if I am not mistaken. He has not read the paper he gave me. The string has not been loosed since the dead woman's hands tied it. He knows it is written in Russian from the words on the covering. It must be translated before I meet Gogol again."

Half an hour later the figure of the New York detective entered the quarter of the Russian colony, but this time he did not rouse the keeper of the boarding-house to which we accompanied him in a former chapter.

He passed old Ivan's den and halted in front of a well-to-do house two blocks beyond it.

He was admitted by a woman who eyed him half-suspiciously, but whose countenance changed the moment he pronounced the name "Sergius" in inquiring tones.

"He is up yet," answered the woman, leading the way up a flight of steps.

A moment later the detective was ushered into a well-lighted and closely-curtained room and stood face to face with a man of five and thirty who had been writing at a table.

At the same time the woman withdrew and left the men alone.

The man thus visited by Silent Sam had short hair, a handsome blonde beard and clear blue eyes. He had also the figure of a young athlete, and the face he displayed was full of intelligence.

No one, not knowing him, would have picked him out for a man who had been a Siberian exile and one of the few who have escaped from confinement in that dread domain.

The Shadow Sphinx and Sergius Mensikoff had met before; but they had not seen one another since the opening of the Centipede trail.

The young Russian held out his hand and the detective drew a chair up to the table.

"I come to you for help," said Sam.

"To me?—to Sergius Mensikoff, the escaped exile?" exclaimed the Nihilist.

"To you," answered Silent Sam.

"Are you hunting some of the good czar's subjects?" grinned Mensikoff to whom the detective's calling was no secret.

Sam's reply was the production of the docu-

ment found by Gogol in the dead clairvoyant's house.

"I can't read your language," he went on, seeing the Russian's gaze riveted upon the packet.

"It may contain a secret," smiled Mensikoff.

"Never mind if it should."

Meantime the detective had taken out his knife and cut the string. The exile looked eagerly on.

When the wrapping had been removed Sam passed the packet across the table and saw the hand of the Nihilist close upon it like the talon of a hawk.

There were not more than a dozen leaves, of heavy parchment-like paper, and the detective watched the Russian's face while his hands straightened the manuscript on the table.

"Gods! what is this?" suddenly cried the exile, bending over the paper, and then he looked at the Shadow Sphinx.

"How came this document to fall into your hands?" he continued.

Silent Sam smiled mysteriously.

"I am a hunter of secrets," he said.

"Yes, yes; but this paper was not for you."

"You may be right, Sergius; but my net caught it all the same."

The Russian's eyes went back to the page which his hand held down.

He read a minute and then looked up again.

"This is the history of a woman who had her day in my country—a beautiful creature—a fascinating serpent. I recollect her well. I met her half a dozen times before I went to the mines. It was said—"

He paused, laid the leaf to one side and looked for a moment at the second one.

"Yes, this is a history of that woman's life," he went on. "It says that she was secretly knouted by command of the czar, and if she was, she carries the scars to-day, that is if she lives."

Silent Sam was deeply interested. He leaned forward drinking in every word that fell from the exile's tongue and forgetting the document on the table.

"Who ever wrote this knew all about the woman," Mensikoff went on. "And if the Russian siren could have discovered the possessor of the secret she would have killed her!"

The detective recoiled with a sharp cry.

"She was always plotting—Vera Vassiloff was. Her beauty was as fatal as a serpent's eyes. If she lives to-day she is engaged in some deep scheme."

"She does live!" broke forth Silent Sam, striking the table with his clinched hand. "She is at the head of the most damnable League that ever existed, and I am on her trail!"

The exile looked at him amazed.

"Then," said he, "be careful! This Russian witch has a brain that is never quiet. Why, she had a pretty boy, but all at once he vanished. It was like that," and Mensikoff snapped his finger.

He went back to the page before the detective could reply, and his eyes seemed to change color while he read.

"Who penned this wonderful paper?" he suddenly exclaimed, snatching the last leaf from the little heap before him.

"My God! it is Sophia Sandorf's work."

"Sophia Sandorf?" echoed the detective.

The name was a strange one to him.

"Ah! you don't know her?" the exile laughed.

Well, let me tell you that Sophia Sandorf was the woman who whipped Vera Vassiloff by command of the czar. Where is she now?"

"She is dead!"

Mensikoff's look became a blank stare.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CENTIPEDE SHOWS ITS STING.

THE light of revelation seemed to illumine the detective's mind.

"Did you ever see Sophia Sandorf?" he asked.

"I saw her once or twice in Russia."

"Never in this country?"

"No. Stay! I will not say that. A year ago I ran across a face that recalled that remarkable woman. It was under the lamps of upper Broadway, and I saw it but for an instant. It came to me like a vision of the past. It was a face that had changed a great deal since then; but the eyes were the same. Sophia Sandorf's eyes were intensely black and had a peculiar glitter."

Silent Sam thought, "So had Madame Gorgon's," but he made no reply.

"Then, there was hatred between those two women," was what he did say.

"Hatred undying," answered the exile.

"What produced it?"

"Love."

"But was there not a difference in their eyes?"

"A great difference. Sophia Sandorf was old enough to have been the other's mother. Women are strange creatures," Mensikoff's lip curled sarcastically as he spoke.

He was still looking straight at the ferret.

"You say you are on the Russian's serpent's trail?" he went on.

"I am after a hand that is at work now—a woman's hand; but it was not alone."

"No. She always worked her games with

somebody. She did this in Russia. Why not here?"

The Shadow Sphinx said nothing. He wanted the exile to go back to the strange manuscript; he was anxious to hear the rest.

Mensikoff returned to his task.

"This is a record of the Serpent's life," he resumed after a minute's reading. "It says here that the child—the son she had by her first husband—turned up missing, just as I have told you. That boy has never been heard from."

"What was his name?"

"Nicholas."

"Why, was the mother knouted?"

"Ah! I've been looking for that!" smiled the Russian. "She was at the head of a conspiracy. She was never quiet. She would have landed in Siberia if she had gone on. They gave her her choice of two sentences: solitary confinement for ten years in the fortress, or the knout."

"And she chose the latter?"

"Yes. A knouting doesn't last long though it leaves scars. She could plot again, you see."

"Mensikoff," said the detective, "did you ever hear of a man called Pagin?"

The exile started.

"Pagin?" he queried. "Don't you mean Orloff?"

Silent Sam shook his head.

"I've heard of Orloff. People change their names sometimes."

"What was Orloff like?"

Mensikoff unlocked a drawer in his table and took out a lot of photographs. Assorting these for a moment, he threw one down before the Sphinx.

"That is Pagin!" exclaimed Silent Sam whereupon the Nihilist laughed.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Sinton," said he. "That is Orloff."

"Were there two men who looked alike?"

"Orloff and Pagin, eh? It may be so."

"Let me tell you. A little more than two months ago I saw the body of a man who was taken from the river. He was known as Pagin."

"Found drowned?"

"Yes."

"A Russian?"

"A Russian."

The exile reflected for a moment. He passed his hand across his brow, and then went back to the page before him.

"Was Orloff mixed up in the Serpent's schemes?"

"She loved him, but he would not be drawn into her coil."

"And she hated him for his refusal?"

"Hated him? That does not tell it. Some men have doubles. I have seen Orloff within the last fortnight."

"In New York?"

"In this city."

"And the Serpent?"

"Oh, she is here, too. You see the birds are all here."

"Now," resumed Silent Sam, "I have another question."

"At your service," bowed the Nihilist.

"Who was her last conquest?"

"The last one I know of, you mean?"

"Certainly."

"He was a man with warm blood in his veins. As handsome a fellow as I ever saw."

"Not a Russian, then?"

"No. He, too, is here."

The detective looked astonished.

"Do not think that because I am nearly always to be found here, I know nothing of what is going on beyond my door," continued Mensikoff. "I am a lucky fellow. Fate throws a good many faces across my path. The man caught and fascinated last by Judith—that is what the Serpent calls herself here in free America—has a singular name and one not known outside his own immediate circle. But the web, as you have unraveled it, may have told you already."

"What is his name?"

"It is Captain Holofernes!"

The detective made no sign indicative of surprise. He may have been prepared for the revelation.

"I guess you have exhausted me for to-night," smiled Mensikoff. "An hour ago I did not think I would ever be asked to recall the Serpent and her plots. You want this? It is yours," and he folded the manuscript. "Since the wielder of the knout is dead, Judith will not get to pay her back."

Silent Sam took the paper half-mechanically and placed it in his bosom.

"Be cautious. I say it again," admonished the exile. "There is always danger when the beautiful Serpent plots. If she is still with Captain Holofernes, and she must be, for both are here, some devilish scheme is afoot. The man is cool, deep and merciless. She had a lot of spies about her across the sea; she must have minions about her now. She lets nothing baffle her. The knouting was but an event in her dangerous career, but one which is still remembered. Sophia Sandorf could not have been 'Sophia Sandorf' in New York. Her discovery by that Russian viper meant—but I need not tell what."

"It is unnecessary," answered the detective with a wave of the hand.

One exciting thought chased another through Silent Sam's mind while he went down the stairs that led to the street.

By seeking the exile he had heard a strange revelation and picked up another link in the chain of mystery and crime.

"That visit wasn't time lost," murmured Silent Sam. "In fact, I haven't lost any time since I got out of the trap. Mensikoff never heard of Pagin, but he knew Orloff. The Centipede is coming out of the shadow, and pretty rapidly, too."

The detective of Gotham seemed pleased while he hurried along, his hat once more over those eyes that let nothing escape them.

As for Mensikoff, the exile, he picked up the photograph of Orloff and looked steadily at it for some time.

"So the Serpent is at work in America?" he said aloud. "What is her game now? I might have questioned the detective, but would he have told me? These men generally keep their secrets, and Captain Sinton is no exception to the rule. I gave him some good advice. He must look out for Judith."

At the same moment a man walking back and forth in a superbly appointed room with brilliant lamplight falling over him was showing that he had some hot tiger blood in his veins.

"At last!" he seemed to send the words through his white teeth as he glanced toward a door that stood ajar. "She takes her own time when it suits her."

He stopped as the door opened with a sound and found himself face to face with a magnificent woman whose close-fitting dress revealed the voluptuousness of her dashing figure.

"Did you find him?" he asked.

"Yes, and a pretty place he is in, too."

"It is better than the other. There were prying neighbors in the alley. He made clean work of the old house."

"He had to do that."

"There will be no hound on the scent from now on."

The woman—Judith—laughed.

"There will be another if we do not act!" she said.

"Another? How?"

"The nabob will turn ferret."

"Major Mascot?"

"Yes."

"He can do nothing."

"We don't want to give him a chance. What did you get from your little trick?"

Captain Holofernes looked at the woman with a half stare of wonder.

"It was a trick all of your own playing," she went on.

"I don't understand."

"You had the girl here. You had Nelly—his ward—here, in this house."

He colored and then affected to laugh defiantly, but her gaze seemed to check him.

"What did you make out, I say?"

"I tried to pick up some information."

"By having his heir here?"

"She came blindfolded and went away without knowing where she had been or whom she had seen."

"The girl is no child!" exclaimed Judith, her eyes gleaming angrily. "We must strike the last blow. The reptile has stung no one for some time. I have doomed Major Mascot."

"To death?"

"To death!"

Captain Holofernes appeared to recoil to the edge of the table near which he stood.

"I have included the girl in the sentence of condemnation," Judith went on.

He did not speak.

"The Centipede must have no enemies when the year closes. Major Mascot rolls in wealth that should have been ours long ago."

Still no answer.

Captain Holofernes was eying Judith like a hawk.

His eyes and the raven hairs of his mustache seemed to glitter in the light.

"I did not think that the oath included a young girl," he said at last.

"It took in all those opposed to us, and what is she but an enemy?" exclaimed Judith.

"You know whose blood is in her veins. To spare her is to play coward. The trail-dog has passed to the unknown."

"But the boy?"

Judith came forward, stamping her foot madly on the rich carpet.

"Silence!" she cried. "You madden me when you make me think of him. The boy! the viper, you mean!"

"I mean Gogol," said Captain Holofernes, torturingly.

"Enough! You have been making a path of escape for one of the doomed!"

"I?"

"You!"

She covered him with her outstretched hand, looking over it with eyes that seemed to blaze.

"Beware!" she went on. "Forget your oath for a moment—show mercy at this stage of the game, and you will wish you had never seen the sun silver the waves that surround your birth—"

place. It is death for Captain Holofernes to forget that *I am Queen of the Centipede League!*"

She gave him one more look, her hand fell slowly to her side, and the following moment she swept from the room, watched by him in silence until she disappeared.

"Let him forget if he dares!" came back to him from beyond the door.

The words were received with a proud smile of—we were going to say—defiance.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ROBBERY.

UNAWARE of Silent Sam's escape from the House of the Lost Number, Major Mascot continued his search for the detective. At the same time he did not forget his agreement with Madame Leo, Madame Gorgon's successor, to look out for the wonderful child *Mysterie*.

Nelly's adventure in the masked man's abode filled him with fears. It told him that the Centipede League was at work, and against him at that.

Ever since the girl's story about the strange woman seen at the foot of the stairs, and Gogol's revelation of what he had seen in the mirror, he (the major) had thought exciting things.

He no longer doubted that a spy of the League had entered his house. He had been watched by a pair of eyes that let nothing escape them. Like Gogol, who had been thrice caught, he was in the shadow of the Centipede.

On the night of the detective's escape Major Mascot slipped from his house on another mission of discovery.

He had mastered the strange document which his visit to the late Captain Totem's quarters had secured.

It had proved a revelation that rendered him more than anxious to find the Shadow Sphinx as soon as possible.

Captain Totem, like Madame Gorgon, had left behind the story of a life.

The fortune-teller had traced out the history, the deep plots and the infamies of the woman known to the reader as Judith; the manuscript left by Captain Totem was fit to be its companion.

It told of another life, and Major Mascot had read it in the solitude of his own room, now with flaming cheeks, and now with no color at all.

He had nearly made up his mind that Silent Sam had been caught by the death net of the Centipede, and the thought urged him to the hunt of *Mysterie*.

If he could find the child, he would take her to Madame Leo, who believed that she could "spell" her as Madame Gorgon had done.

But where should he look for *Mysterie*? That was the puzzling question.

As before, Major Mascot went first to the Shadow Sphinx's old quarters, but without results, then he turned about and sought Papa Sinton's place, to find it locked and silent.

He bit his lip vexatiously, and for a moment stood on the sidewalk like a perplexed hound at the end of the scent.

All at once he took from his pocket the address he had received from Madame Leo, and after a look at it, started off to find the woman.

"She may have some news of the child," thought he.

When he moved away he was watched and followed by the same figure which had played shadow to him on former occasions.

The man still kept his hand in his pocket, never taking it out for a moment, no matter what happened.

Major Mascot seemed to be his prey, and his alone.

He was always looking for the nabob, and when found, kept him in sight.

On this occasion he followed him with the same pertinacity with which he had dogged him to Captain Totem's house.

The major led the spy to Madame Leo's abode, but beyond the door he could not go, for when the millionaire had crossed the threshold it was locked.

The spy of the League fell back and waited.

"From witch to witch," he said with a half muffled laugh. "It is no use, major. The net has been thrown, and there is no escape. I'd rather be at the bottom of the river than in your boots."

Meantime Major Mascot had found Madame Leo, whose sparkling eyes told him that she either expected news or had something to impart.

"What have you for me?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Major Mascot spoke dejectedly.

"Not a word from the child?"

"Not a word."

"I've done a little better than that," smiled the woman.

"Thank fortune."

"She went home from Madame Gorgon's."

"Home? Had she a home besides the one under the dead woman's roof?"

"She had."

"And where is she now?"

"There."

A change came over Major Mascot's face.

"You make a good huntress," he exclaimed.

"Now try your arts on the child—"

"When she recovers," broke in the woman.

"What! is she sick?" cried the millionaire, losing color.

"She is hovering between two worlds."

"That is unfortunate. We lose time."

"Yes."

"If she dies—"

The man hesitated like a person afraid to proceed.

"That seals her tongue," answered Madame Leo.

"But, by heavens, she must not die! She shall have the best care money can procure."

"She's got it now," smiled the woman.

Major Mascot looked pleased.

He went from the house in a frame of mind different from the one in which he had entered.

Mysterie had been found. That was a step; but the child was in the shadow of death.

He had the man-shadow at his heels when he started off.

If he had looked back at one time he might have caught sight of him, but he seemed in too much of a hurry for that.

He returned home.

It was past midnight now and that part of the great city had about it the stillness of the grave.

The tireless spy followed him to his very door and left him with a mock salute and a low laugh of satisfaction.

Major Mascot started, on entering the library. His observing eye showed him that it had been visited during his absence.

He sprang to the table and caught the knob of one of the drawers.

The drawer was locked.

Producing a key, he opened the drawer, thrust in his hand and gave a sharp cry.

Something had been stolen.

Major Mascot lost breath for a moment. His face was painfully white.

"The hand of the accursed League has been here!" said he. "I have been robbed of Captain Totem's story!"

He fell back, looking at the open drawer as though he could not believe all he saw.

Not another thing had been taken.

"I must have been followed to Captain Totem's quarters. There was a spy at my heels, just as there was when I went to Papa Sinton's in search of Captain Sam. This conspiracy has to be throttled. If the Shadow Sphinx has fallen a victim to its wiles, I must look up another bloodhound."

He seemed to think of Nelly at the end of his speech, and went out into the hall. Looking up he caught sight of a figure leaning over the balustrade half-way up the flight.

The next instant it came down and he saw the pale and anxious face of Nelly.

"I have been robbed!" exclaimed Major Mascot.

"Robbed!" echoed the girl. "Show me."

He conducted her into the room and pointed at the drawer still open.

Nelly sprang forward and looked spellbound into it for a moment.

"Did they take much?" she asked, turning upon him.

"A great deal to me," was the reply. "Did you hear any one?"

"I did not."

"The proof of the robber's visit is before me. I saw the misplacement of certain papers on the table the moment I came in. The opening of the drawer confirmed my fears."

"I did not know you were out."

"I had business beyond the house."

Their eyes met at that moment.

"Were you trying to solve the mystery connected with my adventure?" asked Nelly.

"That, and more."

"What does your detective say?"

Major Mascot started in spite of himself.

"He says nothing because I cannot find him," he finally answered.

"The woman's hand is in this, as I believed it has been in other events." The girl seemed to shudder as she spoke. "In Heaven's name, who is she?"

She laid her arm on Major Mascot's sleeve and looked imploringly into his face.

"My child, let me keep a few things."

"From me?"

"Even from you."

The look he received from her he never forgot.

"I have long feared it," said Nelly. "I am in a shadow that is almost as black as night. There is a mystery which makes me shudder when I think of it. It seems to me that the shadow of that woman is the shadow of death itself. Her hand was in that drawer to-night. You think so; you believe that she has been here robbing you of something precious. I will go back to bed but not to sleep. Do you think that between the masked man in whose unknown house I have been and the mysterious woman I can shut my eyes for a moment?"

She moved toward the door, but his hand darting out suddenly checked her.

"I am the person they want," he cried. "I

am the individual who has been marked, not you, Nelly."

"Marked by whom?" exclaimed the girl.

He hesitated. To answer her fairly would be to reveal the existence of the Centipede League.

"Marked by a lot of conspirators whose schemes will be balked!" he returned.

Her intense look was his answer.

"You don't think so, girl?"

"Not unless you can set this detective of yours on the trail. I have confidence in that man. He looks like a hunter, sure to win. Say to him that if he baffles them—that if he takes us out of the shadow of this League—for a league it must be—I will become his wife!"

Major Mascot looked at the girl amazed.

"Tell him this for me!" she went on in the same determined voice. "I weighed my words before I uttered them. I say nothing about love now. I will become the detective's wife if he breaks forever the power of this dark organization! Before Heaven, I swear it!" And the girl's right hand rose solemnly as she uttered the last sentence.

The next minute Major Mascot stood alone in the room like a man in a maze. He had seen the fair creature sweep majestically through the door and disappear toward her bedroom, and as the sound of her footfalls died away he staggered rather than walked to his chair and dropping into it fell forward and across the robbed drawer with a groan.

At this moment, in another part of New York, a man entered a house by means of a back window and went straight to a room whose dimensions he partly revealed by a match.

For ten minutes he searched the room as it had never been searched before, and at the end of that time he pounced suddenly upon something that glittered—something that was flexible yet steel—which he eyed for a minute and then transferred to his pocket.

He went out as he had entered. He left no tracks of his visit, but his last look at the house was one of a step gained—another link picked up.

He had been at the house of the clairvoyant; he had searched the room in which Madame Gorgon had lived her last moments.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOGOL IN THE WEB.

HUNTED as he knew he was by the Centipede, Gogol kept all his senses on the alert.

He was rejoiced to know that Silent Sam had turned up, though he had refrained from inquiring into his absence; but his opinion was that he had been into a trap of some sort, from which he had miraculously escaped.

Left to himself after his interview with his protector following their meeting near Duval's new workshop, Gogol, eager to find out something more about the tenants of the house he had watched, returned the next day to the neighborhood.

The boy's bump of caution was well developed, and he had not forgotten some good advice received from Silent Sam.

He drew himself into the good graces of a woman who kept a small establishment nearly opposite the house, and became her clerk, with his sharp eyes on the house across the street rather than on the needs of her customers.

Day was drawing to a close, and Gogol was thinking of the hour when he could watch the house from the shadow of the trees directly in front of it, when the figure of a man darkened the doorway of the shop.

The boy was busy at the time with a customer, and he did not see the man until his hand dropped upon his shoulder.

Gogol fell back and in an instant became white. He had felt that hand before, but hitherto had slipped from its clutch.

"Madame," said the man sternly to the boy's employer, "I want this boy. We've been looking high and low for him. I'll take him away before he gets a chance to rob you."

Gogol protested, but a look and the tightening of the hand seemed to silence him.

"No words! We'll hear you at the station-house," and the following moment Gogol was literally dragged from the place, feeling that this time he was not only in the shadow of the League, but in the clutches of the League itself.

He was taken across the street and up the steps of the house he had watched with such energy.

"I shall see what it looks like inside, anyhow," thought Gogol.

The door opened and admitted them both. The boy was escorted into a room dimly lighted and left there for a spell.

The moment the door was shut he went to the window. The sash was solid and the shutters closed.

A footstep saluted his ears and he turned back. The man had been gone five minutes, but he was back again.

"Come!" he said to Gogol.

He advanced toward the boy as he spoke, and once more that hand fell upon his shoulder and fastened there like an eagle's talons.

Gogol got to see no more of the house, for he

was taken to the street where he saw a cab drawn up under the boughs of the trees.

The man opened the door, threw him in and sprung in after him.

These events confused the boy's thoughts, they had followed one another with such rapidity.

The cab rattled over the streets, up one and down another, for a space of time which Gogol could not measure. The doors of the vehicle afforded him no clew to his whereabouts for the curtains were drawn.

The boy was glad when the journey ended.

His shoulder was clutched again, but as he was helped from the cab a piece of heavy cloth was thrown over his head and he was helped away.

He counted three steps, and then heard a door open.

When the cloth was removed from his eyes he saw about him an elegant room, high walls, a frescoed ceiling, rich carpet, a large writing-table, and luxurious chairs.

It was as if he had been transported into the reception-room of a merchant prince.

The boy was left alone long enough to let him satisfy his curiosity. He took in everything with an observing eye.

"I'll have something to tell Captain Sam if I ever get out of this," he said to himself. "This must be the lair of the League."

It had begun to seem to him that he was to be left there indefinitely when the door at his left opened softly and a man with a cat's tread entered.

Gogol started at sight of him, as well he might, for the face was covered by a black velvet mask from behind which two eyes glittered while they watched him.

The man walked to an arm-chair at the table and eyed Gogol for a moment longer before he spoke.

"Sit down," said the man in a voice which the mask seemed to deaden.

"I prefer to stand," was the reply, and the detective's partner appeared to increase an inch in stature.

"Just as you like," laughed the hidden lips. "You've been a long time coming to see me."

"I wouldn't have come yet if I had been left to myself," answered Gogol.

"I suspect not. What do you call yourself, boy?"

"Gogol."

"Gogol what?"

"I have no other name. I am just Gogol."

The man's eyes appeared to twinkle.

"What has become of your friend?" was the next question.

"My friend?"

"The detective."

Gogol shook his head.

"No trick, boy!" cried the stranger sternly.

"Why should I trick you? I don't know what has become of my friend."

The boy thought lying was justifiable under the circumstances, and he went at it in a manner calculated to deceive the most suspicious.

The masked man watched him narrowly while he talked.

"So you've lost your protector!" he said.

"I'm afraid I have."

"And, therefore, are alone in the world."

"Yes."

Another moment of intense watching.

"Where do you think you are?" suddenly inquired the Unknown.

"I do not know."

"Have you no idea?"

Gogol had a very strong one, but he thought it was not the time or place to ventilate it.

"If you are only Gogol you can't know much about yourself," continued the man, letting his last query go.

"I don't know much; but I get along very well without knowing."

"Are you American?"

"I think I am."

"With a face like yours?" laughed the stranger. "Come, that's good! You haven't a drop of American blood in your veins."

"Then you know something about me."

"I do."

The man spoke with a positiveness that startled the boy.

"Open your coat and shirt also," he continued.

"How did you know it was there?" asked Gogol.

"What are you talking about?"

"The mark on my flesh—the serpent in the closed hand."

"I'd like to see it."

Gogol opened his garments and exposing his skin, stepped forward and exhibited the same tattoo which Major Mascot had gazed at on a former occasion.

He saw the black eyes of the mask become riveted upon it as though they would devour it with their gaze. For several minutes they studied the mark on his shoulder.

"How long has it been there?" he asked.

"All my life, I guess."

"Who placed it where it is?"

"Some person unknown to me."

"There, that will do."

Gogol stepped back followed by the piercing eyes.

"What was your mother's name, boy?" asked the Unknown.

"I don't know."

"Did she die in this city?"

"You ask me to solve what has long been a mystery. I know nothing at all about my mother."

The man left his chair and crossed the room.

He stooped in front of a steel safe and threw open the heavy door.

Taking from it something but partially seen by the boy, he came back to the table, and holding the object in his hand so that it still remained unseen, he addressed himself to his prisoner.

"Would you like to see your mother's picture?" he queried.

"Would I like to live forever in Paradise?" was the fervent answer.

"What do you think she looked like?"

"I've seen in my dreams a beautiful lady—a lady with bright blue eyes and a loving smile."

"And you called her mother?"

"Yes."

The man laughed.

"Dreams are nothing," cried he.

"They tell me so."

"He took another step toward the boy and Gogol saw that he held a miniature in his hand."

"I am going to see my mother's face!" he thought.

The next instant the half-opened hand closed suddenly and was abruptly withdrawn.

The man had changed his mind.

The boy involuntarily glanced toward the door as if the Unknown had obeyed a command, a look from that direction; but he saw nothing.

"Won't you let me see her pictured face?" he asked.

"Not now."

"When?"

"When it suits me."

The object taken from the safe was carried back, Gogol following the man with a longing look. Suddenly there fell to the floor from the safe something that moved and glittered there for an instant. It happened to land in a spot of light, and before the hand that darted at it could snatch it up, the boy saw the perfect counterfeit of a centipede!

A thrill of horror took instant possession of him. He felt the blood desert his cheeks. He knew now where he was. The reptile, whether real or mechanical, he knew not which, that had been permitted to wriggle on the carpet for a moment, told him into whose clutches he had fallen.

The heavy door of the safe was swung to and the Unknown came back to the table. If he thought that his body had shielded the centipede, or that Gogol was looking elsewhere at the time of its fall, he was mistaken.

Without addressing the boy he jerked a cord that hung above the table, and almost immediately the door opened.

"Take him away," said he to the man who appeared.

"What are you going to do with me? I demand to know," cried Gogol, drawing back from the advancing man.

"You have no right to make demands here!" was the answer. "Away with him, Ivan."

Gogol sprang forward and struck the table with his fist.

"The Centipede League shall pay for this!" he cried.

Then he was taken away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NEW FERRET.

MAJOR MASCOT was much concerned about the mysterious robbery that had taken place under his very roof.

It was his firm belief that the League had played him a cool trick, and he was inclined to believe that the strange woman who had entered his house before had come again.

The robbery seemed to daze him.

True, nothing had been taken but a paper, but it was a very important one. He had found it under the floor in Captain Totem's house.

Who was Captain Totem?

In the first place he was an adventurer—a man who had knocked about the world for more than twenty years. He had never been any man's companion, but he knew much about some people, and there were some secrets which he was not believed to know, but which he knew all the same.

He had spent a part of his life in the tropics, another part in Russia, and between heat and cold he had alternated with the restlessness of a rolling-stone.

Major Mascot was aware that this man had come to New York, that he had become a recluse after his years of wandering and adventure. His money had assisted Captain Totem at odd intervals, and the man was grateful.

He had said that he had prepared a paper which, if anything happened to him suddenly, the major would find under the floor. He said nothing about the contents of that paper, though the nabob believed that it contained the story of a crime which would create a sensation.

It was natural, therefore, that, finding Captain Totem dead, he should look for the hidden document. As we know, it turned up to his hand, to be read and then stolen.

The theft, for a moment, broke Major Mascot. It seemed to tell him that he was completely in the shadow of the Centipede; that the sting of the reptile had been sharpened for him, and that Nelly would soon be deprived of a guardian.

Her resolve to become the wife of the detective was proof to him that she considered the fight an almost hopeless one, and he pitied the girl from the bottom of his heart.

It was the day after the theft that Major Mascot, after a sleepless night, started out on what he had decided should be his last search for Silent Sam.

He went straight to the detective's quarters and found the door locked, as before.

"In the death web! I know it!" he exclaimed, turning away, and half an hour later he entered a room to the door of which was attached a sign bearing this legend:

SELWYN & SEARCH,

DETECTIVES.

He was met by a sharp-looking man of forty who waved him to a chair as he inquired after his wants in a business-like air.

Major Mascot told the story of the robbery, but kept back the darker one of the existence of the League. He could not go to that length as yet. To do so would be to tell his fears—to open the past, and to deprive Silent Sam of final victory if it should turn out that the Shadow Sphinx should come back to the trail.

The detective who listened attentively to his story was Mr. Theodore Selwyn of the firm. He made a few notes while Major Mascot talked and put in a question now and then.

The contents of the stolen papers were, of course, not disclosed.

The major said the document was valuable and that he would give much for its recovery.

He went away believing that he had taken an important step. He had put a new hound on the trail, but he felt—he could not help it—that if he had told the detective something which he had kept back, he might have a clew to begin on when, in fact, he had none.

He did not know that he had been watched nearly all the time, and that by the spy who kept one of his hands in one of his pockets.

The eye of the Centipede was upon Major Mascot no matter what he did or whither he went. He had been followed to the detective agency; the spy had waited for him to come down, and was at his heels when he went off.

"I have been trying to go over the ride I took in the closed cab," were Nelly's first words when he entered his house and once more met the beautiful girl.

"With what success?" he eagerly queried.

"With a little that encourages me," was the reply.

He dropped into his chair and drew the girl upon his knees.

"Now go on."

"I think we made three turns," resumed Nelly.

"All were to the left."

"That is nothing yet, child."

"Not much, but it might be a beginning for our detective, if we had him," she said, brightening. "When I was helped from the cab I was led up three steps, and putting out my hand I found the handle of the door-bell. It was the cast of an animal's head."

"That is something, but there may be a thousand and one such bell-knobs in the city."

"You are bound to discourage me," she smiled.

"No, not that. I see that you have given me no real clew to the house in which you encountered the masked man. How long did it seem between turns?"

"There is where I may have made a mistake. I tried to count the streets, for you see the cab made a peculiar noise whenever it came to a crossing. If I did not fail there were four streets before we made the first turn, five between it and the second wheel, and nine more before we made the last turn. Now, wouldn't that be something for Captain Sinton, if we had him here?"

"If you made no mistake, Nelly, yes," admitted Major Mascot.

"Why don't he come?"

"I do not know."

She drew back and looked him searchingly in the eyes.

"Did the enemy know that he was on the trail?" she asked.

"The enemy knew."

"Then I understand. You fear he has fallen into that enemy's clutches?"

Major Mascot's face was a study.

"I will not think so!" cried the girl, before he could answer her. "I have confidence in that man. I have seen him when he knew it not. He is brave and cool—the very man to fight this battle to a successful close, and you know what I have vowed."

Major Mascot said nothing.

"Find him! He must come to the rescue—"

even out of the jaws of death, if necessary!" Nelly went on. "I will hunt him myself."

"You, child?"

"Why not? We are in the shadow of death."

"But you must not. I have just put another detective on the trail."

"Then you have given up Captain Sam?"

"Yes."

"I have not!"

"But—"

"Let me have my way," interrupted Nelly. "I am convinced that the Shadow Sphinx—this man on whom so much depends—will turn up all right. He cannot have left the skein half spun. It is not his way from what I have heard of him. Captain Sam must come back to his trail!"

Major Mascot, left to himself, remained silent some time.

"The girl ought to know the whole story," said he. "It is simple justice. I wrong her by keeping back a single part of it. By the eternal! I'll tell her all to-night. I'll go over my whole history and she will then know why we are in the shadow of the Centipede."

It was in the middle of the afternoon, when a woman whose face was hidden by a veil, went up the steps of Madame Gorgon's late abode.

The sign "for rent" had disappeared, and in its place hung a board informing the public that "Madame Leo" was the dead woman's successor.

In response to her ring the caller was admitted when, throwing back the veil, she displayed the features of Nelly, the nabob's ward.

The girl was nervous, eager and flushed.

"Can you track lost people?" asked Nelly.

Madame Leo, a handsome woman, smiled strangely.

"I claim to possess that power," she replied. "Your hand, miss."

Nelly held out her hand and the clairvoyant looked at it closely for some seconds.

"He is well lost," she finally said.

The girl started.

"Do you think so?" she cried.

"It is a dark trail."

"Too dark for you, eh?"

"I have not said so."

"But you start out by discouraging me."

"He is in danger."

"He has been so for days."

"He is watched."

"Then he is not dead," exclaimed Nelly.

"Not dead," said Madame Leo firmly.

"I want him found. I must know where he is now," rejoined the girl.

"It must be a case of life and death."

"It is!"

"And of love as well?"

A flush for a moment chased the pallor from Nelly Mascot's cheeks.

"We won't talk about that!" smiled the fortune-teller. "So I must trail him for you, must I?"

"I came hither for that purpose."

"And the sooner I find him the larger the fee?"

"Yes, yes!"

Madame Leo retired for a moment and when she came back she took Nelly's hand once more.

"Should I find him for you, would you keep secret the finding at his request?" she queried.

"I would. I promise that."

"Even from Major Mascot?"

"Yes."

Madame Leo glided to the door and seized the knob.

"The trail ends where we stand," she went on, looking at Nelly.

At the same time she opened the door and there stepped into the room a man, a glimpse of whom sent a thrill through the girl's frame.

It was Silent Sam!

"Thank God!" ejaculated Nelly. "Once more we have a champion on the trail!"

The detective stepped forward and looked down into her eyes as he took her hand.

"You have a champion from this hour!" cried he. "I will stand between you and the shadow of the Centipede. More: I have nearly all the links of the chain, and if I do not destroy the League, hate me forever, girl, with all your heart."

"I will!" was the response. "But I know you will not fail!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SPY'S DOOM.

THE man who had tracked Major Mascot to the office of Selwyn & Search, detectives, stood in Captain Holofernes's presence, apparently waiting for orders.

The captain was writing at the table in the center of the room and the spy was watching him like a hawk.

All at once Captain Holofernes checked the rapid movement of his pen and looked over his shoulder.

"Ivan?"

The spy went forward.

"I have something to say to you, but make sure first that there are no listeners."

The man bowed and went out while Captain Holofernes resumed his work. In a little while

he came back and reported that they were the only tenants of the house at the time.

"Ivan," resumed the man of the League, "I am going to trust you with a delicate and dangerous mission."

There was no response.

"It must not come to Judith's knowledge," he went on. "She, I say, must know nothing of it. If she should discover anything she will proceed to play tigress in the most approved style."

"Yes, master."

"You know her I see, Ivan."

The spy grinned.

"You brought the girl, Nelly, here and took her away according to directions; but we were not quite shrewd enough for Judith. She knows about my side-play. Has she spoken of it to you?"

"She has not."

"She may not do so now. I want you to watch her, Ivan."

"Judith?"

"Judith. She must have a shadow without her knowing it—a constant shadow, and one which she cannot shake. You need not watch Major Mascot until further orders. He has secured a new detective, but we are not afraid of him. The only hound that was ever on the trail has left it; the rest are of no force. Yes, I want you to watch Judith. I know it looks like treason; but she must be shadowed—I care not if she is Queen. Should she lift her hand against Nelly Mascot, you must check her then and there."

Ivan now looked surprised, but did not speak.

"The girl must not feel the sting of the reptile," continued Captain Holofernes. "Judith is her mortal foe. She has condemned everybody to the sting. You know the oath, Ivan?"

The spy bowed. At the same time he took from his pocket the hand we have seen him carry there during his tracking.

It was deformed and horribly scarred.

"That hand ought to nerve you to the task ahead," remarked Captain Holofernes.

Ivan grated his teeth, and, looking down at the crippled member said, like a man speaking through his teeth:

"It will!"

The next moment he had put the hand out of sight, and was waiting for the captain of the League to proceed.

"I have said that Judith must not 'sting' the girl," he continued. "She may strike Major Mascot, but the girl, by heavens! she shall not touch her! I place her in your keeping, Ivan. You must guard her from Judith. The woman is now on the war-path. The oath says: 'All shall feel the death-sting; not one shall escape, no, not one.'"

"That is it," said Ivan, the spy.

Captain Holofernes was silent for a moment.

"Do you know that Madame Gorgon is dead?" he suddenly asked.

"I do."

"Did you know the woman?"

"Yes."

"As Madame Gorgon?"

"I knew her as another, as well."

"Ha! did you?" exclaimed Captain Holofernes, falling back and looking up into Ivan's face. "Then—"

"I discovered it some time ago," the spy went on. "She had changed a good deal."

"So she had. Sophia Sandorf came to America soon after her exploit in Russia. She wielded the knout at the command of the czar, and the back she cut stings yet!"

Captain Holofernes laughed.

"I don't doubt it," replied Ivan.

"There was the Oath again!" exclaimed the captain. "Sophia Sandorf knew Judith the moment she saw her. She knew that she was the woman she knouted; ha, ha! But let this pass. I brought it up to impress you with the importance of your mission. It is dangerous. I keep nothing back. Judith will not brook a spy at her heels if she knows it. She has the cunning of the tigress and the blood of one. When you serve me, Ivan, you serve a man who will abundantly reward you, and one who will stand by you through thick and thin. You must guard Major Mascot's ward—guard her from Judith. The Queen of the Centipede must not harm a hair of the girl's head. I am the traitor—not you, Ivan."

The spy looked strangely at Captain Holofernes for a spell.

He thought: Had Judith ever really fascinated this man?

If she had, was not the spell now broken, and was not Nelly Mascot the new love?

The spy knew much about the lives of Judith and Captain Holofernes. He was a full member of the League organized by the beautiful woman whose secret games in Russia had exiled her from the empire. He knew more than she would have had him know, and up to the present he had served her well.

But now he was her shadow. He was wholly Captain Holofernes's spy, and from the moment of his acceptance of the mission he became Judith's foe.

Not only this, but he passed into the realm

of danger, for, for the Queen of the Centipede to suspicion one was to throw across that one's path the death reptile of Duval's cunning.

Ivan in his new capacity of spy for Captain Holofernes left the house soon after the interview.

His first work was to find Judith, for in finding her and tracking her in all her moves, lay Nelly Mascot's safety.

An hour later Ivan felt his arm touched by a finger. He was on the street a long distance from the house he had quitted. The touch thrilled him.

"Come with me," said the person into whose eyes he looked, and the next moment the spy was following—Judith.

The woman led him, speaking not, to a back room of a second story and shut the door carefully behind them.

Ivan had never been there before. The room was chilly, and everything indicated that it was not regularly inhabited.

From the moment of his entering the piercing black eyes of Judith were fastened upon him.

"Does she know?" thought Ivan. "Can she have overheard what passed between Captain Holofernes and I? I must look out while in her presence. I know the Queen of the Sting!"

Judith motioned Ivan to one of the few chairs in the apartment.

"So you are going to serve but one master?" she began.

Despite his resolve to keep cool the spy started. "Don't betray yourself by coloring," smiled Judith. "It is said that a person cannot serve two masters and serve them well at the same time. You assume the role of traitor at a bad stage of the game for yourself. The oath is nothing to you."

Ivan, with the black eyes of Judith looking him through, as it were, could not find his tongue for a reply.

"Don't lie to me!" Judith went on, leaning toward him. "I want no falsehoods here. You are Captain Holofernes's man. You have deserted me; you shun the Centipede and its object, and take the trail against me!"

"I am still a member of the League. Why—"

"You have flung your oath to the winds!" broke in the woman. "You have sold yourself to Captain Holofernes, who is my creation. Without me he would be dead in chains to-day, instead of living like a nabob. I made that man!"

She fell back and looked at Ivan.

"What are his orders?" she asked.

The spy hesitated.

What! betray Captain Holofernes to the woman he was to watch?

Never! He could not do that.

"Your silence convicts you!" exclaimed Judith. "Your infamous treason stands out on your countenance in letters of ebony. Traitor, will you answer me or sit dumb in your guilt?"

Judith left her chair, and advancing toward Ivan, stopped suddenly and gazed down upon him while her outstretched finger covered his blanched face like a leveled revolver.

"You were to dog my footsteps!" she went on.

No answer.

"You were to watch me in the interest of Captain Holofernes, the man whom I created. You are his paid spy, and, perhaps, his hired assassin, as well. Your oath—the dread oath of the Centipede—lies broken at your feet. Do you know the penalty which the breaking of that vow involves? Speak, traitor!"

Ivan had bitten his lip through during Judith's hot speech. Every word had pierced him like a knife, and stung to the quick, he sprung up when she finished.

"Stand where you are!" cried the Queen of the Centipede. "I loathe the air I breathe when I breathe it in the presence of a traitor. If you will not tell me his commands, keep your lips sealed."

"By the eternal heavens, woman, you can go too far even with a spy, for I have been that," said Ivan. "My withered hand shows the mark of the reptile invented by yourself, and made at Duval's work-bench. I am the only person that ever survived its sting, but look! it cost me a good hand."

He was holding the hideous member out to her, and her eyes were fixed upon it with a malicious gleam.

"You made me a spy!" he went on.

"I thought you fit for nothing else."

"There was before me a better life than this."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Judith. "Repentance comes a little late, Ivan. You are to be a spy to the end. He says, 'Watch the Queen of the Centipede and I will reward you.' The man plays fool when he should profit by the wisdom he has. As I have said, you can't serve both of us. You must quit the game. I will not be watched by a man who has turned traitor. I will have no such people about me, Ivan Danoff, you must die!"

Ivan for a second clutched the table for support.

He feared the woman before him. He knew that nothing stood between her and her resolves, and he stood unnerved in her presence while the sentence she had pronounced rung in his ears.

She came toward him once more; he fell back from the table.

There squirmed in her hand, firmly clutched between thumb and fingers, what looked like a living centipede, only its feelers shone almost dazzlingly.

It was a horrible looking object and beyond it were the blazing black eyes of the Centipede Queen.

Ivan went back until he touched the wall.

"I will have no dogs after me!" cried Judith, following him up.

The next moment he sprang forward with a cry of rage and despair. He made a grab for Judith's wrist, but she lowered her hand at that instant and he caught and closed on the Centipede.

Then he fell back with a cry of agony, and stood still, unable to open his hand and discard the reptile!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CENTIPEDE-MAKER.

THE scene was a horribly thrilling one.

In the midst of his torture Ivan seemed to concentrate all his strength for the opening of that hand; his veins filled and stood out on his pallid forehead like whiplashes; but the fingers would not uncloset, and finally his limbs gave way and he sunk to his knees.

"Yours is the punishment of the traitor!" hissed Judith, bending over his distorted face. "You did not get to serve your new master very long, but long enough to find the sting of the Centipede."

There was no answer, but the look which the woman received was enough to touch any heart but hers.

She watched the stricken man until he fell back and lay upon the floor apparently dead with the hand still clinched, burying in its grasp the deadly invention.

After awhile she went out, leaving him there with the light turned down until it threw no shadow on the wall.

"Captain Holofernes does not heed," she said to herself. "I told him that he must attempt no game of his own, but he sets a spy upon my heels almost before the warning has left my tongue. Does the man, too, want to feel the sting of my reptile? He can go too far! I am going to the end of the oath!"

She turned up afterward in a room occupied by a man who with a shade to protect his eyes was working at a bench where he was fashioning a singular-looking object out of flexible bits of steel.

"Have you one finished?" asked Judith.

"Yes, a new one," answered the man who was our old acquaintance Duval, the centipede-maker.

He left his stool and unlocked a drawer in a small safe at one side of the room. He took from the receptacle a little box which he handed to Judith without opening.

The Queen of the League leaned toward the jet above the work-bench and lifted the lid.

"It is a beautiful one!" she exclaimed, glancing at Duval who was stroking his blonde beard while he watched her with an eye full of adoration.

"I am proud of it," he answered, and Judith lifted the centipede from its bed of pink cotton and continued to admire its parts in the light.

"It wouldn't hurt a child now!" laughed the beautiful woman with another look at the inventor. "But in a moment I can make it as deadly as its living counterpart."

"Deadlier than that, my lady, for the living reptile does not always kill. There is but one hope for the person stung by our pet."

"One, do you say, Duval?" cried Judith with a start.

"But one."

"Name it."

"It is said that the person who, when bitten, holds the bitten part in the fire until the flesh shrivels, renders himself proof against future death by the reptile's sting."

"Do you believe that, Duval?"

"I have never seen it tested."

"Who has?"

"I don't know."

Was Judith thinking of the man she had left in the room where she had met and punished the spy and traitor?

"Duval, I don't believe any such nonsense!" she exclaimed. "There is no antidote for the sting of the reptile I hold in my hand. Where did you hear the story?"

"I can hardly tell where," was the reply.

"An indefinite, foolish rumor—an old beldam's tale!" laughed Judith.

"Perhaps, my lady."

The Queen of the League put the centipede back in its nest after which she transferred box and all to her bosom.

"Good-night, Duval. What! do you want my hand again?" And she held forth her hand which the centipede-maker caught and carried off effusively to his lips.

"It's a dangerous hand—the one you have kissed!" laughed Judith.

"There never was one fairer!" was the answer, and his eyes spoke a language which was not to be misunderstood.

Duval would have held the hand with a lover's lingering if Judith had not withdrawn it, and when she had left him he stood at his bench for a full minute looking at the door beyond which she had vanished.

"I hold her secret," he thought. "If Captain Holofernes were out of the game I believe I could win."

Duval went back slowly to his task, but it was apparent that his thoughts were with the woman with whom he had just parted. He finally threw his work into a drawer and locked it.

"She always spells me whenever she comes!" he exclaimed. "Who says that woman has not the charming powers of the serpent? If by some mischance—some accident—the reptile should sting Captain Holofernes, I'd have a pretty clear field."

He seemed to recoil from his own words, and for a moment he stood in the light like a breathless statue, and nearly as white as one.

All at once he sprang to the safe and took from it a counterfeit of the object he had lately given Judith.

"It is useless without the woman!" he cried, throwing the centipede away in disgust. "I can do the mechanical part—I can complete the mechanism of the reptile—make every part fit—but I can't supply the secret venom. That is her secret."

He shut the iron door and turned the shining knob, locking the safe by a combination which was his secret, no matter what was Judith's.

"After all I'm powerless!" he went on. "I'm nothing but a slave. Because I have a brain to invent and hands to fashion, I am placed here to help others while I wear myself out. I will be Duval, the centipede-maker always. He will be Captain Holofernes, the gilded nabob, and the man who possesses that which I can only touch!"

Duval was both mad and uneasy.

At the conclusion of his last sentence he took a hat from a peg in the wall and crushed it down over his brows. Then he lowered the light until the room was one shadow, and locked the door after him as he departed.

"I've played serf long enough!" he growled. "I feel like breaking my bonds, for by the eternal I was born to keep no man in the luxury of love or gold."

Duval would have been hard to recognize with his collar up and his hat pulled down. His strides were long and rapid ones and a brisk walk of some minutes brought him in front of Captain Holofernes's house.

His eyes seemed to get a tigerish gleam the moment they saw the imposing front of the structure.

"I know who occupies the web!" he cried, clinching his hands.

"He rolls in wealth and lives in the light of the eyes that have blinded me in my slavery! I could tear you to pieces, Captain Holofernes. If I possessed the secret of the venom, I'd show you a trick not in your catalogue of dreams!"

For several minutes Duval glared at the house as though he wanted to rush up the steps and penetrate to the interior with the destructiveness of a cyclone.

All at once the very door which he eyed so ferociously opened and a figure came out.

It was Captain Holofernes.

This sudden appearance seemed to throw Duval off his balance. He fell back like one confronted by an apparition.

Captain Holofernes without seeing the man who resembled a shadow of evil, walked leisurely away and was almost immediately followed by the centipede-maker.

Duval must have thought how easy it would be to run forward and seize Captain Holofernes around the neck, pull him backward and before he could lift a hand in his own defense throttle him and forever end the fight for Judith's smiles.

"I'll track him awhile," murmured Duval. "He is going somewhere. Good fortune may throw him into my hands. He may have a game of his own under way. It would be just like him. A man who has had a hand in twenty plots is never idle. He always has more than one iron in the fire at the same time."

Captain Holofernes led Duval to a gentleman's cafe provided with stalls, one of which he entered.

The centipede-maker entered after him and slipped into the one adjoining the captain's choice.

He heard Captain Holofernes's order, which indicated that he was expecting a friend in a few moments, and this turned out to be true, for Duval heard a step and then a greeting.

The centipede-maker, who had taken his chances in reaching the stall unobserved, leaned toward the partition and listened with all ears.

"I have work for a shrewd man of your class," said Captain Holofernes. "When I want a detective I want a good one."

"I make my profession a passion," was the answer.

"Ho!" thought Duval, "the captain is going to bargain with a detective. I'm not missing anything by my little play."

"Do you ever look into the secrets of a person's life?" queried Captain Holofernes.

"We do nearly everything."

"Everything but catch those who kill mysteriously!" laughed the captain, in a manner that startled Duval.

"We do that—sometimes."

"Let us come to business. I want to know the secret of a young woman's life. She is now the ward of a man well known in certain circles for his wealth and recluse habits. They call him Major Mascot, and the girl is known as Nelly. Just where he obtained her is one of the little things withheld from the public. She hasn't a drop of his blood in her veins. You understand me. I want to know something about the girl."

"To get at her we might have to look into the major's past," said the detective, suggestively.

"I know a good deal of that already," laughed Captain Holofernes. "He was born in New Orleans, went to Cuba when a boy, fought a duel there before he was twenty, killed his man, a rich planter, and was hunted by bloodhounds, but escaped to the coast. After some years spent in different parts of the world he turned up in Russia, made money there, fell into the czar's favor, married a woman of the country, lost her before she gave him an heir, and then," Captain Holofernes paused here just an instant, "then he got into trouble and suddenly left the empire. It was after this last event, which I need not particularize, that he came across Nelly. I know his whole history, lacking but six years of his career. He has been lost to me that long. He may have spent those six years in Tartarus for anything I know to the contrary. No, I won't say that," corrected Captain Holofernes, "for the girl is too pretty to have an origin of that sort."

The centipede-maker heard the detective laugh at the correction.

"You know what I want a clew to the girl's origin. I want to know where he got her. Yes, the case is rather deep, and somewhat intricate; but you have a reputation for getting to the bottom of such things. You detectives sometimes pick up the winning clew at the beginning. See if you can do so now."

Duval fell back and took a long breath.

"Playing a game of his own! I thought so," he exclaimed. "The girl is in the shadow of the death reptile and Captain Holofernes has fallen in love with her. There will be swift work if Judith finds this out."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAJOR MASCOT'S STORY.

MAJOR MASCOT, true to his promise to lift, for Nelly's benefit, the veil that hid the past, summoned the girl into the library at the hour chosen for the narrative.

Nelly had said nothing concerning her meeting with the Shadow Sphinx at Madame Leo's house of magic. She had a secret which, for the present, she was to guard with jealous care even from Major Mascot who was so anxious to have Silent Sam "back on the trail."

Nelly found the major a little flurried and hesitating when she descended to the room, but he soon became himself again.

"The time for a revelation has come," said he, looking into Nelly's expecting eyes.

"If it is a secret that should be kept, don't share it with me," was the quick response.

"I will be the sole judge of that," smiled Major Mascot. "A portion of my life was passed in Cuba, but of that we will say nothing. In the course of my wanderings—some of them enforced—I turned up in Russia, then as now the land of czar and Nihilist. Although an American I became connected with a Russian house where I made money, and with which I might have remained an indefinite period but for some trouble that ensued."

"There was in St. Petersburg at the time a man named Orloff, a full-blooded Russian, and an ex-officer of the Russian Army. He had but lately married a beautiful woman, but unfortunately for him a woman who was continually in little schemes against the Government. I became acquainted with Colonel Orloff's wife, and knowing her as I did, I ventured to inform him of her actions. The pair had by this time a child—a boy who already looked like his handsome father, and as the years went by the resemblance became more and more marked. Nicholas Orloff, the son, and I met often. The boy had formed a liking for me and I was not slow to encourage it, for his father and I were firm friends."

"At last the wife's plot went a little too far. She fell under the eyes of the Russian police and one night she was brought to her door in a state of insensibility. It was then discovered that she had been knouted—whipped until her back was a mass of bleeding scars. No one seemed to know anything about the punishment. She refused to give any information though it afterward leaked out that she had been knouted by command of the czar, and knouted by one of her own sex, at that. She now threw off all restraint, broke with her handsome husband, fell into the snares of a stranger from somewhere, presumably the tropics, from his appearance, and little Nicholas disappeared as though he had been taken to Siberia. It was not long be-

fore this woman began to hate me. She had discovered that I had warned her husband to look out for her plottings, which I had done, hoping to reclaim her, and I was twice attacked after dark, once by the man from the tropics. I could have killed the fellow, but let him off.

"As I have said, little Nicholas Orloff disappeared, and the colonel left St. Petersburg in disgust. I soon became convinced that the knouting had but increased the tiger in Madame Orloff's nature. I was a marked man, followed at night by a lot of spies and harassed by threats secretly conveyed to me during the day. It was death by the dagger or poison to remain in Russia. I realized this in its full force as the days went by. There was a secret League, with Madame Orloff at its head, and it had been organized for the purpose of satisfying her revenge. I resolved not to combat it, but to get beyond its reach.

"I went to Berlin, but was not safe there. I discovered that the minions of the Russian tigress were still after me. In Paris I found them at their old avocation. They met me on the boulevards the day after my arrival, and letters, stamped with the device of a hand strangling a serpent, were delivered to me at my lodgings. Determined to outwit the League, I hired in Paris a man who greatly resembled me, to impersonate me for a week. The resemblance was startlingly striking, and good enough to deceive the portress of my hotel. Dressing this man in my clothes and installing him in my quarters, I left Paris by night and put an ocean between me and the Russian League. In short, I came back to America, having been gone a number of years, and was so changed in personal appearance that I could wear a name not my own and pass for a person to whose individuality I had no right.

"I hid myself in New Orleans, a city with whose streets I was familiar. A week after my arrival I came across a Parisian journal which contained an account of the mysterious death of a man in his lodgings at No. 99, Rue du B—. The account stated that the dead man was an American named so-and-so, mentioning my name. I was dead! I had been found by the conspirators and killed in Paris. The secret dagger of the Russian Cleopatra had done its work, and she had finished the career of one man against whom the League had taken its terrible oath!

"Time passed, and one night there came to my door a man leading a little girl. You do not recollect the circumstance, Nelly? This man was a fugitive from a League, just like me. He had been hunted by the daggers of the League, and I saw at once that he was a Russian. In a moment it flashed across my mind that my identity had been discovered; but it was not so. The man said he wanted me to take care of the child who was his niece until his return, if he ever came back. I took you in, Nelly; and from that night dates our companionship."

Major Mascot filled a glass with wine and drank it off while Nelly looked anxiously at him, her face a strange study.

"He never came back," resumed the major after a pause of several seconds.

"Then you never met again?"

"Never."

"The League found him."

Major Mascot bowed.

"You are right—the League found him!" he said.

"And thus hid forever the truth of my identity?"

The nabob smiled.

"I was robbed a few hours ago, you remember, Nelly?" said he.

"Of a paper! Yes."

"That paper was very important. It threw a good deal of light on the story of your past. It was written by an adventurer—a man named Captain Totem. He has been dead a year, but the document talked. He left it for me in a secret compartment beneath his floor, where I found it. But there must have been a spy at my heels. At any rate, I did not get to keep the paper long. Now, let us go back to the man who brought you to my house in New Orleans. He looked like Colonel Orloff. Dress the men alike and only the keenest eyes could tell which was which. But he was not Colonel Orloff. The man who had charge of you died in this city under the name of Pagin. He was found dead in the harbor not long ago—killed, I think, by mistake."

"Killed by mistake?" echoed Nelly.

"I think so, I say. The League thought it had found Orloff, but instead it was only Pagin. The Paris crime over again, you see. The wrong man killed!"

"Then the League is really at work here?" exclaimed the girl. "It was the death of Pagin that set Captain Sam on the trail."

"Ha! you know that, then?"

Nelly flushed.

"I ask no questions," continued Major Mascot. "Yes, Pagin started the Shadow Sphinx. The League, with Madame Orloff and her last lover—the Apollo from the tropics—at the head of it is at work. It has uncovered me—discovered that the man slaughtered in the Rue du B— was

the wrong person. The discovery has only sharpened the death-sting it carries. The League does not know your identity, Nelly, but cares nothing for that."

"But the lost paper—Captain Totem's story—did it not throw light upon the mystery?"

"It was the story of a crime—one which at first glance would seem totally unconnected with the drama of which we are a part. It was the history of a scene in the life of a man now known in some places as Captain Holofernes. I wish I could have placed that document in Silent Sam's hands. But it is too late now. The Shadow Sphinx has fallen by the secret sting of the League, and I must trust in my new detective and in myself."

Nelly made no reply. She knew that Silent Sam was still fighting the Centipede, but she had promised to keep the secret from every one.

"It is a strange story, and you leave it with a mystery unsolved," the girl said at last.

"I cannot do otherwise," was the answer.

"You have thrown light upon some dark places. The woman I have seen in this house was the Queen of the League."

"Yes."

"And the masked man to whom I was conveyed by night, Captain Holofernes?"

"It must be so."

"I will believe it!" exclaimed Nelly. "I am in the shadow because my ancestry incurred the hatred of the Russian tigress. But what became of Colonel Orloff, the husband?"

"That is a mystery, too," answered Major Mascot. "He has been seen in New York since Pagin's death, but he has vanished."

"In the clutch of the Centipede?"

"Why not?"

"May the destroying hand of heaven fall upon its head!" exclaimed Nelly. "Its power seems everywhere. What can your new ferret do against it? It needs a Silent Sam to follow the trail—to destroy the League. This woman is too much for a detective who has not been on the trail from the death of Pagin, my first guardian. The League is rich in spies. It has them everywhere. You may have been watched for months."

"I have been, or ever since my identity has been re-established. I am not Major Mascot to the woman and her minions. I am the man who crossed her in Russia. We have been condemned together; I will make no secret of this truth, Nelly; but by the eternal heavens, the blow shall prove powerless!"

"Who will render it so?"

"If my new man fails, then I will go straight to the League. I can die but once, but to save you I would die a thousand deaths."

"There shall be no sacrifice of this kind," answered the girl, laying her hand on his arm. "I have a champion who has sworn not to fail."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE USELESS HANDS.

AND Nelly Mascot's champion was at work. Silent Sam back on the trail which he had followed since the death of Pagin, picking up a link here, a link there, was in his element, but he now had something to give a renewed impetus to his hunt.

His meeting with Nelly at the house of Madame Leo, the woman of magic, was not of his own planning, but he had taken advantage of it to assure the girl, who had turned to the necromancer for help, that he renewed his vow to follow the hidden sting of the Centipede until he should render it powerless to harm.

He left Madame Leo's with new blood in his veins, as it were. He knew where to look for Mysterie, the mesmeric phenomenon, who had at various times been so valuable to Madame Gorgon or Sophia Sandorf.

Madame Leo had, as she had informed Major Mascot, discovered the child, and though she was very sick, the detective determined to see her for himself.

It is not for us to stop here and describe Madame Leo's successful search for the girl. She had found her by her own efforts, and Silent Sam knew where to look for her when he left the fortune-teller's house.

Not long after his departure he knocked at a certain door in a not very clean part of the city and was met by a woman who eyed him with a good deal of suspicion. The woman was inclined to be sullen.

"The child will recognize me," said Sam after breaking the ice. "She has seen me before and I'm sure will not object to seeing me now."

This appeared to mollify the woman and the detective was conducted to a partially darkened chamber where he found the child propped up in an old arm-chair.

The recognition on Mysterie's part was instantaneous, but her smile soon gave place to a look of fear.

"You can't 'spell' me, anyhow!" exclaimed the child, recovering. "Madame Gorgon was the only person thus gifted and she is dead."

"What do you know about it?" asked Silent Sam.

They were alone, the woman who had admitted the detective having withdrawn and left them so.

"I don't like to go back to that awful dis-

covery, but if you insist I will for you," was the answer he received, and the child, a shadow of her former self, and she was frail enough before, kept her eyes half-closed as she talked.

Captain Sam did not let a word escape his ears, and when Mysterie had finished her simple story of what she knew about Madame Gorgon's last hours, he felt that his visit had not been made in vain.

Madame Gorgon had received a visitor a short time before her death. Mysterie had heard that person admitted; she had heard voices in the audience-room, but beyond this nothing in addition to her thrilling discovery that Madame Gorgon was dead in her chair.

The telling of her story weakened the child, and the detective did not bother her with questions.

"I can't track any one for you now," smiled she, "because Madame Gorgon, who knew the secret of the power that made me do so is dead. I would like to help you again, and if you can find some one upon whose shoulders her mantle has fallen, bring her hither and I will do so."

The Shadow Sphinx took leave of Mysterie, and went thoughtfully down to the street.

"The trail isn't quite lost," said he. "Mensikoff, the exile who read Madame Gorgon's document, opened a new path when he called her Sophia Sandorf, the woman who knouted the beautiful plotter by command of the czar. Heart failure, eh? Let us see."

He soon afterward rung a doctor's night-bell, and was ushered into a cozy office, to find himself eyed through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles by a man past fifty.

"Did you examine the body of Madame Gorgon, the female necromancer who was recently found dead in her chair?" bluntly questioned the detective.

"I did," replied the doctor, tersely.

"Well?"

"It was a case of heart failure."

"Of course," said Sam, with a smile which caught the doctor's eye. "When the heart ceased to beat the victim was dead."

"Do you doubt my opinion? It was given professionally, and—"

"I am not here to doubt, Doctor Jordan," interrupted Silent Sam. "I am a seeker after information. Were there any marks on the body?"

"There are none when the patient drops dead from heart failure."

"But you did not look for any?"

"No, sir."

The detective picked up his hat.

"I wish to repeat my opinion then professionally given," said the doctor, austere, looking straight into the ferret's eyes. "Madame Gorgon died of heart failure—I use a common term, so as to be readily understood—and I am ready to back up that opinion with my reputation."

Sam was on the street again, and the hands of the clocks were together at the hour of twelve.

He might have gone to the new lodgings which he had engaged for Papa Sinton and himself after their escape from the League's trap, but he turned into a street which took him in an opposite direction.

He reached a certain house whose outward appearance indicated a plain exterior, and entered without knocking.

His footsteps were sounding in the hall when a door opened and he saw the outlines of a woman's figure.

"Is that you Mrs. Telford?" asked the detective.

"I'm glad you've come!" was the answering exclamation.

"What! have you news of the renter of your rooms?"

"Hush! not a word in that tone! I've been foolish myself. I don't want to rouse him; he's been quiet for thirty minutes—may be dead for all I know."

"Who may be dead?"

"The man up-stairs. Something horrible has happened."

During her speeches the woman, who was past middle life, and as white as a cloth, had pulled Silent Sam into a room adjoining the hall, and her voice had dropped to a whisper.

"Something happened up there awhile ago," she went on. "I'm sure my renter had a hand in it, for she came in with a man, and he is up-stairs yet."

"I'll go and see, Mrs. Telford," responded the detective.

"Don't disturb him if he carries on as he did for awhile after she went away," admonished the woman. "He's been quiet enough for a time. I've listened at the door, but couldn't muster up courage enough to go beyond it. Be careful. He may be a raving maniac."

A smile, half-credulous, came to the detective's face, and the next minute he found himself ascending the steps that led to the first landing.

Mrs. Telford was an old acquaintance, and a previous visit having given rise to a suspicion that Judith had rented one of her upper rooms had brought him back with the results just seen.

The Shadow Sphinx of Gotham was not long finding the door at which the landlady had

listened without the requisite amount of courage to proceed further, and for a moment applied his own sharp ear to the keyhole.

He heard no noise.

After a while he turned the knob and went in.

A dim light pervaded the room, and a sickening odor, as of burned flesh, filled the detective's nostrils.

"Who are you?" said a voice.

The sound caused Silent Sam to look toward the darkest corner of the chamber. He saw there a figure which, though crouched, had a human outline, and the moment he moved toward it, that moment it rose and glared at him.

"Gods! I thought she had come back!" exclaimed the stranger, and the Shadow Sphinx looked into a face so terrible in its ghastliness and with its furrows of agony that he felt his blood run cold.

"Turn up the light. I can't. My hands are useless."

The detective stepped to the jet burning blue against the wall and turned it on until the whole room was bright, and the man stood before him holding out a pair of sickening-looking hands.

"I've been mad and sane at intervals ever since her accursed reptile stung me!" he cried, replying to Silent Sam's stare. "The thing is over there in the corner crushed by my heel, though I wish now, knowing you as I do, that I had not spoiled it."

"Do you know me?" asked the detective.

"I ought to. I've followed you like a bloodhound. I wasn't doing her good service when I was not on your track. I had the use of that hand at sundown, but look at it now. It is worse than its mate."

The man laughed in a devilish manner as he held up his crippled hands and compared them.

"A man once stung by the reptile—I mean he who is stung and escapes by burning his hand before the poison gets into the blood—cannot be killed by the infamous thing!" he went on laughing as before. "Two years ago I was stung, but I thrust my hand into the fire and escaped, though crippled for life. That is why I always carried one hand in my pocket when on the trail. To-night I caught the venomous thing—Duval's masterpiece—fairly in my grip, and the last thing I heard as darkness came was her laugh of triumph and the hissed epithet 'Traitor!' I could not unclasp my hand. It was the same thing before. I fell into a swoon which I thought was to be the night of death. But I came out of it. My hand opened; the reptile fell from it and I ground it beneath my heel. Then I turned on the light and held the stung member in the flame. I ground my teeth until they cracked. I saw the flesh shrivel and burn. I was suffocated by the odor. Perhaps I cried aloud. But I persevered until I thought the poison had been subdued by fire. Yes, I know you, and your mission. You are Silent Sam the Shadow Sphinx. I am Ivan!"

"Ivan?"

"Ivan, the spy of the Centipede!—the slave of the Russian viper who decoyed me to the destruction of my hand. Why? She accused me of trying to serve two masters at the same time. I saw the reptile in her hand. It was about to be launched at my throat where I knew it would fasten to my eternal death. Then I sprung at her, the reptile came down, I caught it and—Gods! if I could only forget the rest."

Silent Sam waited for the man to proceed.

"Who told you I was to be found here?" he asked. "She did not. No! she thinks me a corpse where I stand alive to curse her. What do you want to know, Silent Sam? I have served the League for years. I know its trails, its plans, its dark plots in two worlds. I know everything but the secret of the death venom. You must be hands to me from now on. I live for one thing and only one—vengeance! I want to thrust my hands into her face and to grind it beneath my heel as I ground the reptile yonder!"

He sprung across the room and Silent Sam saw him kick something from one corner.

The object slid across the floor and landed at his feet; and he saw at a glance that it had once been a mechanical centipede.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CRISIS.

A DERISIVE laugh not unmixed with scornful triumph, followed the crippled spy's act.

"That is the way I'd like to serve her pretty face!" exclaimed Ivan. "I can never throttle her, for these hands can't grasp anything."

"But you can give me a clew."

"Give you a clew? Ha! that's good!" laughed the spy. "You have been on the trail ever since they took Pagin from the water."

"Ever since then," repeated the detective.

"You have sworn to destroy the Centipede?"

"I have taken an oath to that effect."

"And being a member of the League I would have to fall with it despite my stung hands. I know you city ferrets. You seek fame and success, and that is what makes all of you so merciless."

The spy looked at Silent Sam with a certain savageness that was suggestive of trouble.

"You are of the League, but you are not it," answered the detective.

"I've been its spy. I've followed you from street to street, and I've played shadow at Major Mascot's heels. Do you remember the man you threw down-stairs in the dark?"

"I do."

"Well, that person stands before you," grinned Ivan. "The fall nearly cost me my neck. I was following the major then—doing the bidding of the Centipede. I did not expect to encounter you in the dark; but you were there. I had but one hand, you had two. Of course I had to go to the wall."

The Shadow Sphinx was becoming impatient.

"Do they think me dead?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't they?" replied the spy. "They don't keep many secrets from me; no, no. You were destroyed when Duval's workshop succumbed to the flames. You were in the trap, don't you see?"

"Yes."

"Judith thinks you have left the trail, and Duval works at his infernal trade with the same thought in his head."

"And Captain Holofernes?"

"The tiger—the sleek and handsome destroyer of the tropics?—oh, he evidently thinks with the rest. You are dead, Captain Sam—dead as a smelt to the Centipede. The fire finished you."

The detective could not help smiling.

"What about the eel who slips through one's hands?" queried Ivan.

"Gogol?"

"Yes."

"The boy will turn up all right."

"Then you know—"

The spy stopped suddenly and did not go on. He was on the eve of telling Sam that he (Ivan) had adroitly captured Gogol and taken him to Captain Holofernes, but he seemed to think it best to keep that secret back.

"Never mind the boy," rejoined the detective. "He has avoided all your nets."

"Avoided them, ha, ha!" laughed the spy, with a significance, which Silent Sam did not appear to observe.

"You want treatment for that hand," resumed the ferret.

"Not at the hospital!" exclaimed Ivan, drawing back. "The more it burns the deeper becomes my hatred of that woman and her accursed reptiles. There is one place whither I can go for help. There is one person in this city whom I can trust."

"Then seek him out."

Quieted down but now and then biting his lips when he thought of his condition, Ivan accompanied Silent Sam to the street.

"Don't follow me," said the spy. "Let me go without being tracked. I want a few hours of quiet with the friend whom I shall seek for help. I won't tell the Centipede that you have come back from the dead. I swear it, Captain Sam, by my mother's grave on the steppes of my native country! I will tell you all I know, but not now. She thinks the venom has rid her of the traitor, as she called me. Let her think thus for the present. Captain Holofernes has tired of the tigress with whom he has been associated; but it is death for him to cut loose now. I was serving him when she found me on the street and decoyed me to my fate. One secret yet, Captain Sam. You must guard Nelly, the major's ward. She is deeper than ever in the shadow of the Centipede. She is loved, and that is what adds to her danger."

"Who loves her?" the question sprung without an effort from the detective's tongue.

"Captain Holofernes," was the answer.

"A case of tiger and dove."

"Exactly, and that puts Nelly deeper into the shadow. For Captain Holofernes to love her is for him to emancipate himself from the Centipede; it is to baffle Queen Judith whose oath condemned the girl from the moment she became Major Mascot's ward. Major Mascot was for six years lost to the Queen of the Centipede. During that time he came across Nelly. He was condemned before."

"Why?"

"Ha! don't you know? It was through him that the knout lashed a certain woman in my country."

"But it was done by command of the czar," said the detective, recalling what Mensikoff the exile had imparted.

"So it was," grinned Ivan, showing his teeth.

"By command of the czar. And the knout was wielded by a woman, and was well laid on, too."

"Where is that woman?"

"The wielder of the whip?"

"Yes."

"Dead!"

"Then she escaped the vengeance of Judith of the Centipede."

"That will be answered when souls are called up to judgment. Let me go, Captain Sam. It is not for the last time. I promise you that. I will keep the secret which I know you want kept. You are dead. Duval's fire finished you."

Ivan drew off and turned from the detective without further speech.

Silent Sam watched his figure until it was lost among the shadows of the pavement.

"There must be a closing in soon," he mur-

mured. "The Centipede has an enemy in its own camp. Judith has played with unsheathed claws to-night. She will not let Captain Holofernes, partner though he be, succeed in his love-making. There is where the danger lies."

The New York detective went back to the room where he had discovered Ivan and his mutilated hands.

The crushed Centipede still lay on the floor and Silent Sam gathered it up with care and hid the whole in his bosom.

Half an hour later he sat at a round table with a handsome old man at his elbow and the two were trying to restore a number of legs and scales to their accustomed places.

"He must have tried to grind it to powder," suddenly laughed the eldest of the pair.

"He did. He saw his best hand useless for life, and the cause of it was beneath his heel. Is it a wonder that he crushed it?"

The task the two had assumed was impossible of accomplishment.

"Duval is the man of do the job!" exclaimed Silent Sam. "He knows the mechanism of the reptile. He made it."

"All but the venom."

"All but that. Without this finishing touch the centipede would be harmless. Judith's hand clothes it with death; Duval's only makes it possible for her to do so."

"If you had followed Ivan after he left you you would know where he can be found when wanted."

"I will find him!" exclaimed the detective. "A man with a pair of useless hands, but with a brain like his, won't hide long. Besides, he will not go back to his mistress for service. He wants her to believe that the reptile finished him. He won't try to strike until his hand heals somewhat. By that time the trail will have ended and the Centipede, please Heaven, will be crushed."

"Beware!" Papa Sinton's hand fell admonishingly upon Silent Sam's arm, and the two men—father and son—looked into each other's faces. "The most important moment of the whole hunt has arrived. The girl, Nelly, is in dread peril. Judith has discovered Captain Holofernes's double dealing. She more than suspects that he would save Nelly from the Shadow. Why? To make her his wife, of course!"

The detective sprung up.

"That shall never be done!" he cried.

"The ruin of the scheme rests with you," answered Papa Sinton calmly. "Don't you see how the girl is situated? She stands between Captain Holofernes's love and Judith's reptile."

"My God! I see!" cried Silent Sam.

"As I have said, everything depends on your playing. There must be no hasty play. A cool brain and a steady hand must meet the enemy at every turn. The crisis has come. My son, you must meet it with a confidence that will command success. Let that knouted witch of Russia discover without your knowledge that you did not perish in the trap beneath Duval's workshop, and the reptile will find you despite your boasted cunning. The boy ought to have something new by this time. Where is Gogol?"

A cloud of anxiety seemed to darken the detective's brow.

"I confess I don't know," he replied.

"If he has been trapped—"

"I think him too cunning for that. He has escaped so often—slipped through Ivans's hands so adroitly—that I have confidence in his ability to elude all their snares."

"He must elude them!" cried Papa Sinton. "Gogol must come out of the game, unstung by the Centipede. His identity is no more a question in my mind."

"Nor in mine," responded the Gotham ferret. "Gogol has a name at last. Mensikoff's story settled that. I will look for the boy at once."

"And send him hither when found."

Papa Sinton watched his detective son with pride and anxiety until the last vestige of his figure faded from view beyond the foot of the stairs that led to their new quarters. Even after this he ran to the window and tried to get another glimpse of him on the street, but in vain. It seemed to him that Sam had gone to danger; that the son he was so proud of had left him to fall into the deadly net of the Centipede, and the old man stood at the window a long time, but quitted it at last with a muttered prayer.

As to the detective he walked rapidly from the spot with thoughts of Gogol on his mind.

He went back to his old quarters where the boy had still a cot, but Gogol had not been there.

"I'm bound up in that boy, despite his origin!" exclaimed Sam, turning reluctantly away. "If he don't turn up by morning I will track him through the child, Mystérie, if Madame Leo is not mistaken in her own powers. I pray Heaven she is not."

He went from his old place to the neighborhood occupied by Captain Holofernes and the beautiful queen of the plot.

The house looked uninhabited from the outside, for the shutters were drawn and no ray of light rewarded the detective's eyes.

He walked slowly past the steps. When he reached them he leaned toward the door for an

instant and saw by the light of the lamp directly opposite the head of the bell-knob.

"Nelly was not mistaken," he mentally exclaimed. "She entered that house and met Captain Holofernes. The lion-headed bell-knob fastens this fact. Ivan did not lie. The Captain's love is fatal to Nelly if Judith interposes, and that she will I have abundant testimony. Can I save her? Sam Sinton, you must have ever before you from this moment the fair young girl who stands in the shadow of a dreadful fate through no fault of her own. You must break the power of the Centipede, you must save Nelly Mascot or die by the sting of the accursed reptile!"

He looked back at the door and saw on the step a figure that sent a torrent of hot blood through his brain.

It had come there without noise and from the house at that, and now it stood, not erect, but bent a little toward him, as though a pair of eyes were watching him with dark suspicion.

Sam saw this sight by looking over his shoulder, and he knew that the person on the step was the Queen of the reptile League!

CHAPTER XXIX. DUVAL'S "HAND."

THERE was no doubt in the detective's mind that Judith saw him; but had she fixed his identity?

The time for revealing himself in his true light to her had not come; he would be "dead" awhile longer, and he had already promised himself that it would not be very long either.

Watched by the statue-like figure on the steps of Captain Holofernes's mansion, Silent Sam moved off as though he was not aware of the espionage.

Judith waited until he turned the nearest corner and then slipped from her perch.

"The figure looks familiar even in the light of the street lamps, but, gods! it cannot be!" she exclaimed.

The detective pursued his way with the woman following with the watchfulness and the stealth of a tiger.

His last look back had shown him Judith still on the step, then he had turned the corner, losing sight of her altogether.

Judith's quick eyes picked him out on the new street. She saw the detective moving along with no thought of pursuit and her eyes sparkled while she kept track of him.

It was not long before the truth, the startling truth, illumined Judith's mind.

She could not mistake the man she was dogging.

He had come back from the dead, as it were, had risen from the ashes of Duval's workshop and was still on the trail of the deadly League!

"The reptile ought to sting its maker for his failure!" cried Judith. "I ought to throw it against his throat and let its poison take his life. He failed! He did not finish the ferret whom he caught in his trap, though with uplifted hand he swore that the detective had left the game forever! Is he a traitor like Ivan was? If he is, better for him if he had never seen the light of day!"

Silent Sam led Judith by a roundabout way to the new quarters in which he had installed his father.

A smile of triumph overspread her face. She had tracked the detective home.

After a brief watch the Queen of the Centipede withdrew.

"I won't startle the captain," she said, speaking to herself. "Not to-night, at least. He does not dream that I have discovered his secret play nor that the traitor lies with the crushed Centipede in his swollen hand. In his eagerness to save the doomed girl he will destroy himself as well."

Judith went not back to the house from whose steps she had made the thrilling discovery of the detective's escape, but to the place where she had left the traitor-spy of the Centipede.

A desire which she could not control seemed to draw her back to the terrible spot.

She opened the unlocked hall door and slipped into the faintly-lighted corridor.

Judith, as the renter of the room on the second floor, had a key to it in her pocket.

She ascended noiselessly to the upper landing, crept down to the door, opened it and looked in.

The gas jet was small and blue near the wall just as Silent Sam and Ivan had left it.

Judith advanced toward it, taking care where she stepped, and turned it on a little more.

"What! gone?" she exclaimed, falling back as her glance took in the whole chamber. "I left him yonder with the reptile in his hand, and death in his eyes. He was dead. There is no escape from the bite of the reptile save by fire and he was too far gone to apply that. What became of Ivan, the traitor?"

Judith searched the room, but found nothing. "Was he here?" she resumed. "Did the Shadow Sphinx find him? No; he knows nothing of this house, he does not dream that I have hired this room, that I made it a trap for the Judas of the League!"

She saw the mystery of Ivan's absence getting deeper and deeper. She had come back to look

at her victim, to assure herself that the reptile had done its work effectually, but there was no victim to greet her. The spot where she had left him was untenanted.

After awhile Judith having turned the light back to its blueness, went down the stairs and out upon the street once more.

Doubt was to be seen in her eyes.

The mysterious had become doubtful.

What if Ivan had escaped death by the sting of the reptile? What if, his heart filled with revenge, he had come across the detective?

These mental questions thrilled the woman of the League.

She was pale, but outwardly calm when she entered the house half an hour after the discovery just recorded.

The man who received her in a small room which looked like a workshop waited for her to speak.

"You can't trap anybody!" suddenly exclaimed Judith.

"Why not?"

"Because they escape."

In an instant a pallor of fear came over Duval's cheek's.

"Do I startle you?" laughed Judith. "I thought the news would be in the nature of a shock."

"In God's name, what do you mean? Not—"

"That the Shadow Sphinx who fell into the dungeon when you jerked the cord was not buried there? Yes, I mean nothing else!" broke in the woman.

Duval fell back against his work-bench, and gave her a long stare in silence.

"The devil helped him out!" he said at last.

"We won't discuss that," was the answer. "I know he is at large for I have seen him. We must try again, Duval; this time with the reptile."

The man said nothing.

The dangerous beauty of Judith had always fascinated him. He had been her slave from the moment of their first encounter, and to see her almost constantly in Captain Holofernes's presence and a tenant of the same mansion that sheltered him was gall to his love.

He recalled while he now looked into the woman's eyes his last adventure, the conversation he had overheard in the *cafe* between Captain Holofernes and the detective he had employed to disclose Nelly Mascot's past. The whole thing came back fresh and strong to Duval. He knew that Captain Holofernes had been smitten by the beauty of the girl whom the Centipede League had doomed and he wondered what effect a disclosure of his secret would have upon Judith.

Duval thought faster than he had ever thought before.

"I'm sorry for the escape," he said at last to Judith. "I thought the trap held them when the match was struck. I will take the blame, and, if I am to be judged by the law of the Centipede, I am ready to take the sting as well."

He opened his collar and bared his neck, at the same time straightening and sealing his lips with resolution.

"No, I will hold no one responsible," answered Judith, pleased by Duval's readiness. "You did your work faithfully, as you thought. We will yet catch and baffle the city ferret. I want another reptile."

Duval looked surprised.

"Another, if you please, good Duval," she continued, with a smile.

He turned to the safe with a thought like this firing his brain:

Why not give her a hint of Captain Holofernes's play? It might tell me what she thinks of him; but, then, if she really loves him, won't it turn her on the girl, and put the sting to work in that direction! If she has lost any feeling for the handsome devil who is her partner in the oath-bound League, there might be hope for me; but if she actually loves him, there is none.

Meantime Judith was watching Duval with the eye of a hawk.

She seemed to see that he was hesitating, that something was between his hand and the door of the safe.

"Give me the best one, Duval," said she.

Her voice startled him. His hand darted forward, closed on the brazen knob, and a wench swung the door open.

Snatching up one of those little boxes that presented themselves, Duval turned to her with the prize in his hand.

"Here, Lady Judith," said he as their eyes met. "Don't you think the reptile might find work within the circle of the League?"

She looked at him with wonderment in her dark eyes, and Duval, dropping his gaze, confessed that he had spoken without thinking.

"Never mind, Duval," smiled Judith. "Truth breaks its bonds sometimes. You are right. The Centipede might find employment at home. There may be traitors in the camp."

"If not traitors, double-dealers," answered the centipede-maker, encouraged.

"Ah, then you knew that Ivan—"

Judith was checked by the look she received from the man before her.

"I have said nothing about Ivan," replied

Duval. "The double-dealing may be in the inner circle."

"Ha! do you talk of Captain Holofernes?"

Duval's start and look instantly betrayed him. "Come!" cried Judith eagerly. "Tell me what you know, for you know something worth imparting. Your look tells me this, Duval, and I will say here, that you shall be shielded by my hand, and that he, notwithstanding the place he holds, shall not touch you for the revelation."

It seemed to Duval that his blood was fire in his veins. Judith's words were like the sudden unraveling to him of a mystery. She was not so tied to Captain Holofernes that she could not punish him for treachery, and with him out of the way he (Duval) might possess the beautiful creature whose love was dangerous and whose hatred meant death.

The moth that plays around the candle dies at last fascinated by the light; but the centipede-maker did not think of this in his infatuation.

He told Judith without reserve the story of his adventure in the *cafe*. Every word of the conversation between Captain Holofernes and the detective had been burned into his brain, as it were, and Judith heard the compact as though she had listened to it as Duval had done.

She said nothing during the story, but leaning back in the chair before the narrator watched him with fixed gaze.

In her hand lay the box which held the deadly invention, and at times Duval saw her fingers encircle it as though they would tear it open after crushing it and release the fruit of his genius.

"A thousand thanks," said Judith, when Duval rested after having spun his thread to the end. "You have good ears, Duval, and you've used them for me."

"Do you think he loves the girl?" ventured the centipede-maker.

"As the tiger loves the lamb!" laughed the Queen of the League.

"But he talked like a lover to the detective."

"Ha, did he, Duval?" Judith laughed.

"I thought so."

"We'll look after this affair. The girl is doomed—you know why, Duval. It is a crime against the Centipede to shield one who has been sentenced by its secret decree."

"If he has fallen in love with Major Mascot's ward, Captain Holofernes will attempt to save her," insinuated Duval.

"And lose his own head!" cried Judith. "The captain must look out. He may put himself into the shadow of the sting. I'm not so sure that he's not there now!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HAND-WRITING ON THE WALL.

"It wasn't a bad play. I've directed her suspicions against him. Captain Holofernes is losing his grip on the Queen of the Centipede, and what is his loss may become my fortune."

Thus spoke Duval in high glee when once more he found himself alone in his workshop. Judith had taken her departure, and the rustle of her skirts still sounded in his ears.

She went off taking with her the reptile which he had taken from the safe at her wish, and which lacked but the secret venom to make it as deadly as its living counterpart of the tropics.

Judith went back to her abode, and slipping up-stairs, stole into her chamber and locked the door.

It was past midnight, and seemingly she was the only person awake in the house. She had seen that the library was not occupied, but she did not listen at the door of Captain Holofernes's room.

But the Queen of the Centipede was not the only wakeful person in the house.

If she had listened, she might have heard a noise like unto the gnawing of a rat.

It was in a distant part of the house, but sounds are sometimes strangely carried, and if Judith's ears had been keen enough, she might have heard this one.

Presently the noise ceased, but was soon resumed, as if the rat were resting between sounds. At last one of the lower panels of a door dropped out, and a hand caught it before it could touch the floor.

It was not a man's hand which deftly caught the panel, but a boy's, and it was as brown as parchment, too.

The following moment an odd-looking head appeared in the opening, and then a human body squeezed through.

Gogol had liberated himself.

The pen-knife held in his hand told how the "rat" had used his "teeth," and the boy's eyes could not conceal his triumph.

Gogol, whom we saw last in the presence of Captain Holofernes, had helped himself with some success; but he was still under the roof that sheltered the League of death.

He had ushered himself into a small room which was not entirely dark, for some light entering from a jet that burned in an adjacent corridor, showed him the appointments of the place.

"I wonder what's become of Captain Hidden-face?" exclaimed Gogol, recalling his interview with Captain Holofernes. "If he doesn't turn

up soon, he'll lose a guest, and the spy with the iron grip will find more work on his hands."

Nobody came to disturb him, and he seemed to be the only wakeful person in the house.

"I've got something for Silent Sam now, and he'll listen with astonishment dancing in his eyes," the boy went on. "This is the den of the Centipede. I was talked to by the man called Captain Holofernes, but I did not get to see Judith. Judith, I am now convinced, is the person I saw in Major Mascot's house; but I don't want to see her here. That woman knows something about me. So does Silent Sam. I am a mystery unto myself, for Pagin, who was killed by the Centipede, didn't live long enough to clear it up. I am not Gogol; but I can't stop here to speculate. To be seen where I am by any one of the several inmates of the house might mean death for me."

Gogol opened the door that led into the hall where the jet burned. Ascending the stair he leaned over the balustrade and turned the light nearly out, then gliding down he moved toward the front door.

The key was in the lock and in an instant his hand was upon it.

The click of the key in the lock sounded in Gogol's ears like the crack of a rifle. He jerked the door open and heard an alarm go off over his head.

"It's too late now!" cried the boy. "The rat is out of the reptile's den!" And the next instant he was on the sidewalk running at the top of his speed in the shadow of the buildings.

If he had tarried a minute in the hallway he would have heard and seen a figure at the top of the stairs.

The alarm had startled Judith, not yet retired, and it was the figure of the Centipede Queen that responded to the stroke.

"Some one went out!" exclaimed Judith. "It is past midnight, and therefore the incident means something."

She saw that the light burning when she came in was now out.

She went down and lit up the little room into which Gogol emerged from his prison.

Almost the first sight which met her gaze was the gaping panel.

Judith sprang forward and picked it up.

"Captain Holofernes has had a prisoner who has escaped!" she exclaimed. "He cut his way through the door and it was him who started the alarm that roused me."

Judith stood for a moment like a person in a maze of rage and doubt.

"He may have caught the boy," she said. "Ivan the traitor was on the lookout for him. Captain Holofernes is just now playing a game of his own, and there is no telling what he will do. Duval thought he was putting me on a new trail, and I let him think so. But who has escaped from this house? That is the question."

Judith unlocked the door with the missing panel and entered the room.

It was nearly bare of furniture, but a cot, a chair and a table kept it from being entirely empty.

"There has been a prisoner here!" cried Judith, catching sight of some crumbs on the floor under the table. "Captain Holofernes, you are getting to be a man of secrets. You get a new one every day. They'll ruin you yet. Take care!"

She supplemented her last speech with a laugh, then suddenly crossed the room and held her breath while she read some writing on the smooth, white wall above the cot and in just such a spot where one lying down and provided with a pencil would be likely to write out his thoughts in the dark.

It happened that the gas-jet threw its light upon this very place, so that every word of the scrawl was visible to the Queen of the League.

This is what Judith read:

"I am Gogol! I was brought hither by the man who caught me—the spy of the Centipede League of Gotham. I have seen Captain Holofernes, but masked. He put me into this place. Judith, who is the real head of the Centipede, is a creature who deserves a thousand deaths. Captain Sam will avenge me. He knows the crimes and the secrets of the whole League. They did not kill him, as they thought. He is the man who will crush the League and destroy it, with the Russian viper who gave birth to it. If I die here, I will be avenged by the Shadow Sphinx. He saved my life once. He knows the trails of the League. As God reigns in heaven, the Centipede will be crushed by this prince of detectives!"

Judith, with dilated eyes and burning brain, did not miss a word of this inscription.

She seemed to read it with set teeth, and when she reached the end she drew back with a low, derisive laugh.

"The boy is both positive and prophetic!" she exclaimed. "Why did Captain Holofernes keep this capture from me? He knew that I have longed to feel Gogol, as the boy calls himself, in my hands. This was no secret. Ivan knew it. Ivan was all the time looking for him. Above all things I wanted this boy. Now he has been here—a prisoner in the house that shelters me—but he has escaped! A thousand curses upon your head, Captain Holofernes! Has your mad infatuation for this doomed girl called

Nelly blinded you to the death I carry in my bosom?"

Judith's words came back to her from all quarters of Gogol's late prison with a strange and mocking echo.

She soon afterward swept majestically from the room, lowered the light as she passed and disappeared.

If Captain Holofernes could have seen her then he would have feared the woman whom he was crossing, for Judith was a serpent who had been wounded by his heel and who had turned on him with a deadly sting.

She ascended to Captain Holofernes's private apartment, but the door was locked and she found nothing there.

Breathing hard she went down to the library. The steel safe was the first thing that met her gaze.

"Is there some proof beyond the door?" she exclaimed. "I know how to reach the heart of the safe. He has but few secrets from me and they are condemning him."

She knelt a moment in front of the heavy door, then swung it back with an ejaculation of triumph, and looked into the safe.

A minute later her hands were among the papers which she had discovered.

"I did not know he had this!" she cried, staring at a photograph which she found in one of the pigeon-holes. "I was not aware one of them was in this country. I knew the bounds of Russia had a copy, but not that Captain Holofernes was so provided. Why does he keep this picture? I don't look that way now. I did once, but then I was not Judith. He is playing double, and as a traitor is greater than Ivan was, he keeps the portrait under guard."

She tore the photograph in two and threw the pieces into the darkest corner of the safe.

"That condemns him! He has deceived me. He has said that he had no picture of me, but here is one kept for a purpose. The man I have saved from swift and righteous vengeance in two worlds is a traitor. Even now he violates his oath and stretches forth his hand to save a new love from the shadow of the reptile. The fool has doomed himself. Captain Holofernes dies, but not until the Centipede has stung the one he would rescue. The detective is on the trail, Gogol has escaped; Major Mascot expects to baffle me with a new ferret. Ah, the world is against me; but the world knows not what the Queen of the Sting can do!"

Judith closed the safe and turned toward the hall.

"Why not?" she cried, catching sight of the captain's table. "I won't fight him in the dark. I will let him know that nothing has escaped me. He may escape or remain like a rabbit and perish."

She sprang to the table and caught up a blue pencil which rested on a handsome rack.

A sheet of blotting paper, its soft surface as yet unsullied, lay before her.

"This is just what I want!" said Judith, and the next instant she had dashed across the sheet in deep blue which could escape no eye the following sentence:

"Your spy is dead, and you have been sentenced to death by the sting!"

She threw the pencil away, looked at her work, laughed as her eyes gleamed, and departed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MAJOR AND CAPTAIN.

THE next morning there came with the letter-carrier to a certain house known beyond its immediate neighborhood a letter addressed to "Miss Nelly Mascot."

The young lady eyed the chirography with puzzled curiosity a few moments, and then broke the seal.

She was the only occupant of the room, having received the mail from the carrier, and placed that portion which was not hers on Major Mascot's table.

The envelope contained a single sheet on which was written the following in the same "hand" as that of the superscription:

"MISS NELLY:—

"Will you believe one who takes a great interest in your welfare when he tells you that the next few hours are to determine your future life for good or evil? You are in the shadow of a horror and the wings of it even now touch your face. Will you trust the writer to deliver you from that shadow? He alone can do so. The bloodhounds of New York are powerless. No one can save you but him who knows the secrets and the trail of the fate which hovers over you. The sentence is a double one. Major Mascot can not break its power, and you are not safe beneath his roof. I do not strive to unnerve you for a purpose. I would save you from the shadow in which you stand. I know that you know something about it; but the half has not been told. The crisis and the hour have come! I am ready to rescue you. Will you be saved, or will you perish and be forever unavenged? Come to the door within an hour after reading this as a sign that you will heed the warning, or remain in the house in proof of the fact that even a beautiful woman can seal her doom by stubbornness."

"A FRIEND."

Nelly read the strange letter twice over before she looked up or was aware that Major Mascot had quietly entered and was looking at her.

She started at sight of him, lost color, then flushed, and the letter shaking in her hand was thrust forward.

"Another!" exclaimed the major glancing at the signature.

"Yes," and Nelly watched him closely while he read.

"Something for my new detective Captain Selwyn," he exclaimed.

"No!" cried Nelly, thinking of a ferret who had no superior, to her notions. "I will take charge of the letter."

"But it is a decoy! It comes straight from the enemy. There is a deep and infamous game in this affair. It tells me that the Centipede is desperate."

"But there are frank admissions in the letter."

"Yes; it contains some truth, but more villainy. The writer is in the circle."

"Then you suspect—"

"I do," broke in Major Mascot. "You haven't forgotten your strange ride in the closed cab, nor the interview with the masked man which followed it?"

"I have not."

"Compare the writing of this letter and that on the page of the one which decoyed you then. You found it since your return."

Nelly went to her boudoir and returned with a sheet which she placed in the major's hands.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "The same hand penned both of these documents. Compare the letters. There have been attempts to disguise the chirography as if the writer feared you had preserved the first letter."

Nelly said nothing, but her gaze confirmed Major Mascot's observation.

There was in the letters on the two sheets a similarity which was not difficult to make out.

"The masked man wrote both letters!" said the nabob, holding the two sheets side by side and glancing triumphantly at Nelly.

"Do you think the man called—it is no secret now—Captain Holofernes—would rescue you from the reptile whose sting he has been directing for years? The Centipede wants to save you, Nelly! The Shadow wants to dissolve itself, ha, ha!"

He laughed almost boisterously in his ward's face.

"I don't think the League would help us, but the motive of that letter?—what can it be?"

"It is deep in subtlety," was the answer.

"The hour allotted in the missive has not expired. Go to the door, Nelly."

The young girl's look instantly became a stare of amazement.

"That would be answering Captain Holofernes to his liking!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly."

"But—"

"We can play a hand as cunning as the one he has shown," interrupted Major Mascot. "To the door, child!—to the door!"

"If you insist—"

"I do."

Nelly threw the letters upon the table and went out upon the step. Here and there she saw a man, but they were not familiar in contour to her, and none of course wore the black mask which she had encountered beneath the roof of the League.

Major Mascot descending the stairs greeted her in the hall on her return.

"He saw you!" he smiled.

Nelly started.

"Who saw me?"

"The man on guard."

"Where was he?"

"Across the street watching the door like a hawk."

"Was it Captain Holofernes or a spy?"

"A spy, probably. Now, don't quit the house on any pretext until my return."

"You are going—"

"To fasten the clamps on the man at the bottom of this affair!"

Major Mascot quitted the house with the eagerness of a man on the last quarter of an important trail, and Nelly going to the window, watched him out of sight with thoughts and feelings which she could not satisfactorily analyze.

The doomed nabob turned into the first street he reached. A few yards ahead a man was walking as fast as himself and the moment he saw him the major increased his gait.

He had already discovered the spy who had watched for Nelly's response to the letter, and to keep him in sight would be to score an important point against the Centipede.

Major Mascot had for the present made himself his own detective, and had resolved to follow the spy to his destination, believing that it was the home of the League—the house occupied by Judith and Captain Holofernes.

The major an hour later found himself in a quarter of the city which he seldom visited.

It was near the wharves and recalled to his mind the starting of Silent Sam's trail, for close by was the very spot where Pagin, the victim of the Centipede, had been taken from the water and where the Shadow Sphinx for the first time saw the mark of Duval's terrible reptile.

Major Mascot had followed the man through many crooks and turns to this vicinity. He

knew he was not far from the house once occupied by Captain Totem from under whose floor he had taken the document which he had scarcely read before it was mysteriously stolen as we have seen.

His wonderment increased when the man he had followed turned suddenly about and led him almost straight to that very house.

Major Mascot followed with singular thoughts which were more puzzling still when he saw the man enter the building and vanish.

"Does he suspect that Captain Totem left a story behind?" the major asked himself. "Has he come to this place for it? If he has, then the man I have followed is Captain Holofernes himself!"

The nabob watched the house for an hour without again catching sight of the quarry he had tracked.

His patience became exhausted; he felt an uncurbed nervousness taking possession of him.

"He has gone through the house and given me the slip!" he exclaimed. "Surely nothing could keep him there all this time. He has had time to learn that Captain Totem died a year ago, time, too, to search the room he occupied if he wanted to. He can't be in there; but I may learn something about his movements from the woman who lives there."

Eager to carry out the plan suggested by his last words, Major Mascot approached the house with gaze riveted upon it.

The door stood ajar, one of its habits, most likely, for he had found it thus on a former visit, and the next minute he had pushed it open and stood in the hallway.

Major Mascot was debating which way to go in order to find the woman he had met there before when a step sounded on the stairs which confronted him.

He heard voices at the same time.

"Heaven! Captain Holofernes is here still!" he exclaimed. "Why not face him? Why not have it out now and forever with the man of the Centipede?"

Major Mascot saw two figures in the dim light at the head of the steps. In another moment they would be bodily before him and he would confront for the first time in years the handsome conspirator whose name was linked to that of the Queen of the Centipede.

Yes, why not stand his ground and meet this man?

It was rather dark where Major Mascot stood; he had fallen back into a doorway which acted as an ambush but from which he could see the parties descending the stair.

"Do you think he found anything?" asked the man, in a rich voice.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir, but he looked pleased when he went away."

"As if his quest had not been fruitless, eh?"

"Something like that."

"Did Captain Totem do much writing?"

Major Mascot could see that the speaker had stopped and was looking up at the woman on the steps above him.

"Now and then he wrote some," was the reply.

"Did he ever mail any letters?"

"I never heard of him doing that."

The man came down again.

"You're sure he wasn't buried with some papers in his bosom, or elsewhere?" he asked.

"I'm pretty sure he wasn't, for those who laid him out said he had nothing concealed upon his person."

The man listening to all this could see that the questioner had encountered an enigma which seemed to increase in mystery the more he attacked it.

He reached the bottom of the stair a moment after his last question. Major Mascot could have touched him so close they stood on one another, and he knew that the moment the man turned they would be brought face to face.

"Yes, Captain Holofernes, Captain Totem wrote a great deal!" spoke the nabob.

The man wheeled as if a serpent had hissed behind him.

At sight of Major Mascot he fell back with a cry which was followed by one from the woman, and at the same time the nabob throwing out his hands went forward.

"We had to meet some time, why not now?" continued Major Mascot.

In a moment the handsome man seemed to recover, for he laughed.

"You are right; why not now?" he answered. The two men stood face to face in the vague light that came in through the dusty transom.

Their figures were almost counterparts in height and contour, but they did not look alike. Major Mascot, though fine looking, had not the handsome olive face of Captain Holofernes. The tropics had done much for that face, and the cold of Russia had not affected it.

"Leave us, madame!" said Captain Holofernes to the woman, who regarded them in speechless silence, and then he looked at Major Mascot.

"Let us go up to Captain Totem's old quarters," he went on. "I guess they're not haunted, though a dead man occupied them last. Since we have met, you're the very man I would see."

"Come, then," cried Major Mascot, with

burning eagerness, "I too have something to say."

They went up-stairs together, touching one another on the way, but speaking not.

Major Mascot led the way to the room which had given him the hidden document, and when they had entered he turned on Captain Holofernes and saw a smile under the sweeping mustache.

"You haven't changed much since," he said.

"Since when?"

"Why, since the Queen of the Centipede ensnared you and made you her abject slave!"

The shaft went home.

Captain Holofernes recoiled and colored.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COMPACT.

CAPTAIN HOLOFERNES made no response for a moment, and before he spoke again he had looked Major Mascot over from head to foot.

"You attack boldly," said he, showing his teeth by the grin that accompanied the words.

"Why shouldn't I? There need be no concealment between us. We know one another. You are Captain Holofernes, so called, and I am—"

"Daniel Dantell!" broke in the captain of the League.

"Just as you wish!" smiled Mascot.

Thus the ice was broken between these men, and in the very room which had witnessed the death of the character called Captain Totem.

"You have played spy; you have followed me!" Captain Holofernes resumed, in accusing tones.

"Would I be here at this hour if I had not played detective on my own hook?"

"Certainly not."

"One has to take his own case in hand under certain circumstances."

Captain Holofernes smiled as if the words had recalled the springing of the trap in Duval's old workshop and the fall of the Shadow Sphinx into the dungeon beneath.

"Let us come to an understanding," he said at length. "Now that we have met after years of separation we ought to have something to talk about. What shall it be, Major Mascot, so-called?"

The coolness, the perfect audacity of the man amused while it also startled Nelly's guardian.

"You have offered to rescue the young lady," responded Mascot.

"I?"

"Yes, by the letter which reached her this morning. You have not deserted the League, captain? The spell of the witch's eyes has not lost its power?"

"I will conceal nothing," cried Captain Holofernes; "nothing concerning the authorship of that letter, at least, for it is plain to me that you have tracked me from the very shadow of your house."

"That is true. I have not lost sight of you for a second."

"A good fox!" laughed Captain Holofernes, before proceeding. "I am no longer under the hand of the woman known as Judith, though I have not, for excellent reasons, cut loose from what is known as the League."

"But so situated that you can sever your connection with it at any time and destroy its power for evil?" smiled Mascot half sarcastically.

"Exactly!" cried the other eagerly. "I need not tell you that Nelly, your ward, is in the shadow—that she has been doomed by the League, nor that even now the most terrible of deaths threatens her?"

"I know all this."

"I know more. The inner workings of the Centipede—the very thoughts of Judith its Queen are known to me."

"They ought to be if they are known to any one."

"You are right. I can go so far and no further," continued Captain Holofernes. "I am tired of this ceaseless plotting and striking. I cannot see the innocent, the beautiful, the young, die at the whim of one who knows no more mercy than does the velvet-footed, prowling tigress of the jungle. As I have said—I know you read the letter—I stand ready to save Nelly from the sting of the reptile. No other person can save her. The holder of Judith's secrets must step between her and death."

Major Mascot with the semblance of a haughty smile at his lips looked like an unbeliever.

Captain Holofernes rightly interpreted his look.

"You doubt," said he. "You say mentally that Nelly can escape through other means. You are laughing at my words. I know what you have done. You have set a detective to work. You have placed on the trail a man who is expected to destroy the League at a blow. Ah! you put your trust in a weak vessel."

The captain's laugh sounded strangely in Major Mascot's ears.

"The young lady's situation means your own as well," the captain resumed.

"I'm not thinking of myself."

"No? Good! I know the girl is dear to you."

"She is."

"You are fighting for her now."

"For her alone."

Major Mascot seemed to be drawing Captain Holofernes out.

"Then," said the captain, "the moment you reject an offer to help, that moment you prove recreant to the beautiful inmate of your house. Major Mascot, every moment is precious now. The shadow is nearer than you think. The decree is on the eve of fulfillment, but the hand—the only hand—that can defeat it is before you. No matter what I have been nor who I am now. Let us dismiss the past: let Daniel Dantell and his career be lost in the duty of the present. We must act. You must say yes or no—here, in this room where perished miserably and alone a man not unknown to us. You must decide the fate of Nelly, your child in everything but actual parentage. Shall Captain Holofernes save her, or shall she die by the sting of the reptile?"

Captain Holofernes seemed to have increased an inch in stature during his speech. His eyes glowed with an excitement he could not keep down, and the hand which he had thrust forward looked soft and silk-like in its olive hue.

"Why do you hold back?" he went on, noticing Major Mascot's hesitation. "Is it because the hand that can save her is mine? There have been times in your history when you would not have rejected the friendship of him who stands before you. In Russia once after the knouting of Colonel Orloff's wife, and later in Paris. Come, Major Mascot—I come back to the name you'd rather hear just now—shall it be life or death?"

"You look beyond the mere act of rescue," answered Mascot. "You expect a reward—"

"Reward has not been mentioned!" exclaimed Captain Holofernes.

"A man in your position would not take the risks which a separation from the League means without some expected compensation."

"To Tartarus with your wealth!" was the quick retort. "I have wealth enough of my own. I wouldn't touch a dollar of your fortune. No! I'd sooner serve Judith the remainder of my days."

Major Mascot did not speak.

"You don't want my hand to come between Nelly and the reptile!" Captain Holofernes went on. "You prefer to trust the detective you have placed on the trail. Trust him, and when he has failed—as fail he will—for there is but one person who can save the girl from the shadows, curse yourself for your folly and then perish miserably as other fools have perished before you!"

Captain Holofernes dropped his outstretched hand and looked toward the door.

"I have offered you life but you spurn it," he added. "They tell me that you love Nelly! Love her, eh? You want to hold her in the Shadow until the awful end is at hand."

He crossed the room watched by Major Mascot until his hand found the latch.

"It is plain to me," said the nabob. "You have unveiled your motive by your eagerness. You have found the eyes of Nelly deeper and brighter than those of Judith."

Instantly Captain Holofernes fell back from the door and strode agilely toward Major Mascot.

"Am I not worthy of her?" he exclaimed. "Analyze the blood in her veins and say if I am beneath her. We lost sight of you for six years, Daniel Dantell; the wrong man died—was killed you will say—in Paris. You fled to America under another name, escaped from the shadow of our revenge by a clever trick. For nearly six years you were lost, but the finding of you in the end was as certain as death. We found you rolling in wealth, and with an angel in the house. You were doomed long ago and the girl, too, fell under the oath of the League. I can desert Judith, but the moment I do so I condemn myself to the terrors of the Centipede, or I can remain as I am, and withholding the hand of rescue laugh at you and your bloodhounds. Realize what you have rejected, Major Mascot."

"I have weighed the matter."

"And have decided for death, eh? Then let us bring this interview to a close. You can be convicted as the slayer of the child you profess to love! Your detectives are powerless. The League is strong or weak as you make it. You have made it stronger and deadlier than ever!"

The next moment Captain Holofernes with a backward glance opened the door and crossed the step.

Major Mascot followed him with an arch smile.

"This is cool infamy without a parallel," thought the nabob.

He went forward and heard Captain Holofernes stop on the stair.

"I accept," said Major Mascot.

A look of triumph instantly filled the captain's eyes.

"Without conditions?" came from below.

"Without conditions."

The following second the figure of Captain Holofernes came up the steps and the two men stood once more in the little room.

"Nelly shall be rescued," said Judith's mate.

"When?"

"In time to save her from the fulfillment of the decree!"

"If you fail—"

"Fail?" interrupted Captain Holofernes with a wicked laugh. "Why should I fail with the vengeance of Judith confronting me? Let Nelly submit to much that may appear mysterious. Keep your detectives from my track. The bungling hounds will hamper me. Nobody can beat a tigress but those who know her haunts and habits. In this case I know them, ha, ha!"

Major Mascot was the last person to quit the scene of this strange meeting. He stood alone in the room for several minutes after Captain Holofernes's departure. His brain seemed in a whirl, but with a certain thought he burst out in a fit of convulsive laughter.

"It was the best play I had in hand!" cried he. "I have hoodwinked the tigress's mate. I have deceived Captain Holofernes, and he has gone to the betrayal of Judith, believing that I will turn over to him Nelly, the innocent and beautiful. You have become my tool—my dupe, Captain Holofernes! You may save Nelly from the Shadow, but the act will not give you the victory you anticipate. I am breaking by a deep and clever play the power of the Centipede. I need the help of no detective. Silent Sam, were he in the game, would be useless now!"

Major Mascot quitted the house with buoyant spirits.

He believed that he had played a hand which would destroy the League, for Captain Holofernes had become Nelly's champion, no matter what end he had in view, and Judith would find between her and her doomed prey the hand of the man who knew her secrets.

After the rescue he, Major Mascot, could turn on the rescuer and deal him a sudden blow which would end the whole affair.

What a brilliant scheme it was! What use had he for detectives now?

He found Nelly awaiting his return with a face whose anxiety was not to be mistaken for something else.

"The Centipede itself stands in the shadow of ruin!" he exclaimed, in answer to her look. "There is treason within its circle, and the traitor—the sender of the letter—will rescue you—"

"That man!" interrupted Nelly, seizing his arm.

"Yes."

"Never! I read between his lines and know what he seeks. The dead has come to life. I will be saved by the champion of our cause or perish by the sting!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SPELL-TRAIL.

THE Queen of the League, the beautiful creature whose back bore the scars of the knout, felt that with the discovery of Silent Sam's continued existence a new obstacle to final success had been placed in her path.

Having tracked the detective to the house in which he had quartered both his father and himself, she set about forming a plan for his swift and certain destruction.

There was to be no failure this time. She would not intrust the work to Duval, the centipede-maker, though she knew that his infatuation, she was not blind to that, would carry him to any lengths at her beck. Why should she trust him? Had he not failed once? His trap had prove abortive, and while the League deemed the detective dead, he had been all the time on its trail.

Judith had another agent at her command—the man who lodged at the old Russian's boarding-house in hopes of keeping her posted concerning Silent Sam's movements; but she would not summon him to her aid.

She would trust no one. To do the work herself would be to have a secret which she would not have to share with any one. She had unmasked Captain Holofernes; Ivan, the traitor, had confessed to enough to let her know that Holofernes was playing a game of love, and therefore trying to bring to naught the work of the League.

"The detective first," said Judith to herself, "then the girl and the chief traitor."

She did not expect to find Captain Holofernes at home when she returned after her discovery of Gogol's imprisonment and escape. In this she was not disappointed, for no one greeted her.

There were present, however, signs which told her that the captain had been there.

The warning which she had left on the table had been disturbed, showing that some one had read it.

He knew, then, that she was aware of his double dealing. He might quit the city, or attempt to defeat her by some deep play; but she laughed when she thought of this.

Judith considered herself a match for all her opposers.

There was one thing that puzzled her, and it came up often during the day.

This was the mysterious disappearance of Ivan, who had caught the centipede in his hand, to fall writhing in agony at her feet.

As the reader will recollect, she had slipped back to the scene of the tragedy, to find the room unoccupied and Ivan gone.

She durst not ask the landlady for any particulars, for inquiry would connect her with the death.

It seems not to have entered Judith's head that Ivan had escaped, though terribly maimed for life. She could not believe that fire promptly applied would destroy the effects of the deadly sting, though it was not unknown to her that Ivan's hidden hand had been touched by the poison and burned almost to a crisp.

Judith did not fear Captain Holofernes. If he knew her ways, she had studied him with care. She had not insured him without knowing what he was and how far he could be trusted. Therefore, she was not much startled by the discovery that, smitten by Nelly Mascot's beauty, he could plot to save her from the sting of the Centipede, and even carry his plotting to her (Judith's) destruction.

But that he would openly denounce her to the authorities she did not believe.

Why should he? Was he not a member of the League? Would not an expose of her work throw him into the toils beyond escape? No, she did not fear a play of this kind by Captain Holofernes.

Judith found herself in a certain quarter of the city when the day had almost reached its close: She had not lately entered it, but had been there some time, and with the plan for Silent Sam's destruction carefully thought out and approved of.

She was on guard, with her gaze riveted upon the little house to which she had tracked the Shadow Sphinx from the door of Captain Holofernes's abode, and now with talons newly sharpened and eyes on the watch, she waited for the man she had marked.

And where was Silent Sam while the Centipede Queen lay in ambush for him?

Judith had barely taken up her post when a woman alighted from a cab not far from a group of frame tenements.

She looked up at the tall houses and singling out one, went toward it and entered.

Going to the third landing she was admitted to a room where she greeted a man who seemed pleased to see her.

"You are prompt," said this man with an approving smile. "This is the lady I've been waiting for," and the new-comer who was Madame Leo, Madame Gorgon's successor, bowed to the woman to whom she had been presented.

"I want you to be easy with the child," replied the tenant of the room.

"As kind as we can be, madame," responded Madame Leo.

"She is weak and nervous, but a wonderful little thing. There's not another like her in the city, and but for the love I bear her, I'd make her help me out of this place."

Silent Sam—the man was none other than the Shadow Sphinx—conducted Madame Leo to the adjoining room which was darkened, but in the center of which could be seen an arm-chair with a child in it.

The detective shut the door tightly behind him and the two advanced.

"I've been waiting for you," said Mysterie in low tones, at the same time fixing her eyes upon Madame Leo whose orbs seemed to emit a fascinating gleam. "Do you think you have the powers that belonged to Madame Gorgon?" Then after a lengthy pause. "Ah! I fear her mantle has fallen upon your shoulders."

The female necromancer stole a hasty glance at the Sphinx and bent over the child.

Her power seemed marvelous.

Mysterie tried to defeat the strange spell that came over her; she looked imploringly at the detective, forgetting that she had promised to submit for his sake, and at last, unable to win the battle, she fell wholly into the net of the dark charm.

Silent Sam was no less astonished. Madame Leo had excelled herself. Had she discovered Madame Gorgon's secret by taking possession of her house of magic and mystery?

When the marvelous child was completely under the spell the woman said:

"You are now back in the old house, Mysterie; in the little room you occupied next to Madame Gorgon's parlor. It is night, the hour not far from ten. What do you see?"

A tremor of repulsion for a moment shook the fragile figure in the chair, and Silent Sam leaned forward, eager to see the ashen lips fall apart and hear the words come forth.

"I see into Madame Gorgon's room," said the little victim of the mesmeric spell. "She is alone. Now she rises from the table where she has been mixing love philters for some of her patrons and goes to the door for the bell has rung. She is back now, but not alone. A lady is with her."

"What sort of a lady, child?" ventures Madame Leo.

"A tall lady with fine black eyes and well-dressed figure. She has come to Madame Gor-

gon to consult her about a lost friend, which causes madame to look at her and smile as if she doubts her story. The lady seats herself at the table. She puts her hand across it and Madame Gorgon looks at it in the lamplight. The other hand—"

Mysterie paused and Silent Sam with difficulty kept back a cry.

Was he going to lose the victory now?

"Find that other hand," said Madame Leo to the child.

"I see it now. It is deep in the lady's pocket beneath the table. Now it draws forth a little box. It places it in her lap the while she eyes Madame Gorgon who is reading the lines in her palm. The box is open now and a horrible spider-like object is in the lady's hand. Why can't Madame Gorgon see that, too? Won't you let me warn her? Please do!"

"Go on," answered Madame Leo.

"Ah! the hand is half-way between lap and table," continued Mysterie. "The spider has a hundred legs that shake in the ascent for it is lifted slowly and the woman all the time watches Madame Gorgon, leaving her hand to take care of what it holds. The spider is now at the edge of the table, another move will carry it above it; but see! the hand which Madame Gorgon has been 'reading' leaps up and catches her by the throat. It is as quick as thought. At the same time the lady rises, still holding to her victim, and the spider wriggling in her grip comes into view. Madame Gorgon sees it and tries to cry out, but no sound issues from her throat. The woman with the spider is bending across the table. Her hand suddenly tears open Madame Gorgon's collar and now she has thrown the insect into her bosom!"

The Shadow Sphinx seeing the effect of this revelation upon the child seized Madame Leo's arm.

"Not yet!" cried the fortune-teller. "The murderess must be tracked to her lair, even if it kills the child."

The detective's hand was shaken loose and the play went on.

"What else?" questioned Madame Leo. "What is the woman with the spider doing now?"

"She has just placed Madame Leo in her great chair. She neither moves nor breathes, but only stares. Now the spider is taken from her bosom and placed back in the little box. The woman crosses the room, stops at the door and looks a moment at Madame Gorgon and then vanishes."

"Follow her," commanded the fortune-teller.

"Into the street?"

"Yes. Don't lose sight of her for a second."

The child, taking a long breath, telling of exhaustion, proceeded to obey.

She followed, by means of her marvelous power, up one street and down another, under the lamps and through the shadows the fitting figure of "the woman with the spider."

Silent Sam listened with breathless interest.

The supernatural trail was one he had not calculated on.

"It is enough!" he cried, when Mysterie had lost the quarry behind a door whose number she had just spoken. "I ask no more, Madame Leo. Bring the child back to life. She has strengthened the link which I picked up in Madame Gorgon's chamber. The centipede was not replaced in the box without a feeler missing. I have the missing link. It was found within a foot of Madame Gorgon's table. Now bring the child back to life."

Madame Leo, who had turned to Mysterie, staggered from her with an exclamation of horror.

"No person on earth can do that!" she cried, with blanched face. "The child is dead!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SHADOWED SHADOW.

"DEAD? No, no!" echoed the Shadow Sphinx, his gaze becoming fixed on the corpse-like face that lay among the back cushions of the chair.

"Look for yourself," answered Madame Leo.

The detective bent over the child and placed a finger eagerly on the pulse.

There was a faint throb there, but not too faint to give him hope.

"She isn't gone!" he looked up at the fortune-teller. "The spark of life that is left must be fanned into a flame."

"It shall be done!" exclaimed the woman, encouraged, and the next instant she was exerting herself to this end.

Silent Sam looked on until he saw the transparent lids unclothe and the eyes get once more a lifelike expression.

"Brought back to life! A thousand thanks, Madame Leo," said he, touching the woman's shoulder. "I leave the child in your care. If I can prevent she shall never submit to the ordeal again," and with this he gazed once more at Mysterie and took his departure.

"The lost centipede feeler and the supernatural trail fit exactly," he said to himself, while he descended to the sidewalk. "Another test will kill the child. It is too much for her. She was almost gone at the conclusion of the ordeal. It shall not be repeated. It is cruelty."

Meanwhile the woman whom we left "on guard" in another part of the city had kept her post with a persistence worthy of a better cause.

Judith saw the shadows of the houses cast themselves across the street from the west. The day was nearing its close and with the approach of night came fear and dread uncertainty.

Silent Sam, her quarry, had not come back to the house she had watched with such care.

Where was he, and what held him back?

There came at last toward the house a figure which she eyed with more interest than she had bestowed upon any one yet seen.

It came forward under the lamps just lit, and Judith felt her heart stand still from excitement while she watched.

The man moved along until nearly opposite her ambush. He came in front of the new quarters of father and son and looked up at one of the little windows over the front door.

"It is the ferret!" murmured Judith. "Now my work begins. There must be no failure like Duval's was. The detective first, then the doomed beauty and Captain Holofernes, the traitor."

Silent Sam plunged into the house and vanished, and the Queen of the Centipede had to content herself with the not very flattering prospects for a short wait.

She durst not follow the detective. The interior of the house was unknown to her. She would watch for his reappearance and then play the card she held.

She did not see the Shadow Sphinx enter a room with a subdued light nor catch sight of the old man who turned upon Sam from the table and greeted him with a smile.

"You should have come ten minutes sooner," said Papa Sinton.

"Why then?"

"The boy has been here waiting for you."

"Gogol?"

"Gogol."

"Ha! why didn't he wait longer?" queried the detective.

"I could not keep him another minute."

"Where has the boy been?"

"In prison."

"I thought so. And he was rat enough to get out, eh?"

"Yes."

"Good for Gogol!" exclaimed Silent Sam.

Silent Sam stood alongside the table, and was gazing down into the patriarchal face of his father.

"Gogol has been imprisoned in the Centipede's web," continued the old man.

"At the captain's?"

"Nowhere else."

"Then he has a story for me?"

"He has."

Papa Sinton was watching his son as though he were trying to fathom the events of the last few hours.

"The drama moves," smiled Sam. "The links are coming together, and before long the chain will be finished."

"Then you have made another discovery?"

"I have."

"I advised you to get the child to submit to a test by Madame Leo if she would."

The detective's hand had fallen upon his parent's shoulder and was resting there.

"There should be no secrets between us," he replied.

"I leave that to you."

"A man ought to trust his own father. I told you my little secrets years ago; why not now?"

There was no reply.

"I have been to Myserie," Sam resumed. "Madame Leo is a fit successor of Madame Gorgon. Under the spell of her power the strange child went back to her mistress's last moments. She showed me Madame Gorgon's last visitor. I witnessed the whole terrible affair that took place in the witch's parlor. I saw the centipede creep up over the edge of the table and spring, guided by the destroyer's hand, toward the victim's bosom."

"Heavens!"

"I followed that woman from the house, led by the child, until I lost her beyond the door of number 999."

"The den of the reptile!" cried Papa Sinton.

Silent Sam's eyes had a sharp glitter as he nodded.

"The evidence is supernatural," resumed the human ferret. "A court would laugh at it. I know that."

"Yes."

"But there is no mistake. The child never trails amiss. She has helped me with Madame Gorgon for a guide; she has given me the missing link under the influence of Madame Leo's spell. The League is now in my hand like that," And the detective held out his hand and clinched it.

"What are you going to do?" asked the old man.

"I shall crush it! Ivan, the man with the useless hands, dreams and thinks of nothing but revenge. I know where he is. I have found the man who has found the only antidote for the sting of the reptile, but at the expense of his

hands. I confess to you that no time must be lost now that the crisis has come."

"Then, for heaven's sake, lose no time!" cried Papa Sinton. "Should Judith discover our escape—"

"It is no secret now. She knows it."

The old man fell back in his chair and stared at the face above him.

"I think I can read your thoughts," continued Sam, meeting the stare with a quiet smile. "You fear that the Centipede Queen will turn upon me with all her cunning and power."

"She will do so!"

"She will do nothing less," rejoined Silent Sam. "Even now she may be on guard with the sting of the reptile charged with the subtle poison. She may be following me with the same death that overtook Pagin who was found in the river; which entered Sophia Sandorf's veins in the house of the woman called Madame Gorgon. You know now why the fortune-teller quitted this sphere so suddenly. She once wielded the knout by command of the czar. For her to be found by the creature whose back still carries the scars of that lash was to die. She will look for me first of all now. That will give Nelly and her guardian a respite. She will not think of dealing with the serpent on her hearth until she has dealt with me."

"The serpent on her hearth?"

"Captain Holofernes, her slave, her tool, but now a man who courts death by the sting because a fresh face and a beautiful one has crossed his path. Look back over your trails. You were a ferret before I saw the light of day. Had you ever a trail like this one? Were there Judiths when you played shadow on the streets of Gotham?"

"I yield to her," answered Papa Sinton.

Silent Sam moved back and threw a glance toward the door.

"Where will I find Gogol?" he asked.

"Probably asleep in the old quarters."

"Is the boy suspicious?"

"He is."

"Do you think he suspects the truth?"

"Candidly, I do. He looked back at me when he was at the door yonder, and saying: 'Light has fallen upon a dark place; I'm getting out of the shadow that has enveloped me,' left me to stare at the spot where he had been, while I heard his boots on the stairs."

Silent Sam reflected for a moment.

"The boy must know all some time," said he.

"Do you think his short prison life opened his eyes?"

"If it did not, what did?"

There was no response, the door opened and the detective stepped out and vanished.

The huntress on guard saw him emerge from the house. It was the end of a long vigil for Judith.

"At last!" she exclaimed. "The man who detained him must be Papa Sinton, for if one escaped from Duval's trap why not the other?"

She watched Sam while he walked off, but soon started after him, and the Shadow Sphinx had upon his trail a shadow that carried with it the merciless coldness of death.

Judith followed him half-way across the city.

There was a stealth about her movements that gave her the appearance of a slipping tigress.

She did not for a single moment lose sight of the detective.

Silent Sam, eager to find Gogol before he closed in on the League, went direct to the old quarters.

He entered the house and disappeared.

"Back to the old place!" exclaimed Judith, who knew the quarters through one of Ivan's reports. "He won't remain there. The detective is 'closing in,' as he calls it. Closing in on the Centipede, ha, ha! It looks like it, with me at his heels! I'm strong enough, armed as I am, to cope with him in the dark. A clutch, a dash against the wall and the cast of the reptile! I'm good enough for these things."

She went up to the door which Silent Sam had entered and finding it unlocked, it was a street hall door, pushed it open.

A dim staircase arose before her.

Judith looked up and listened.

No sound came down from above, but this circumstance did not discourage her.

She went back against the wall and took from her bosom a small box.

Opening this she removed an object which even in the vague light that prevailed had a shape calculated to fill a tender-nerved person with horror.

Judith held it tightly with thumb and finger of the left hand, and then, with eyes that seemed to blaze in their eagerness, looked up again, and thus terribly armed began to wait for the detective.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RESCUE REJECTED.

MEANWHILE Captain Holofernes, mindful of his compact with Major Mascot, was planning how to save Nelly from the doom that threatened her, and at the same time relieve himself from the vengeance which, according to the dark code of the Centipede, should overtake the member who played spy or informer against it.

He knew nothing of Ivan's fate; Duval's eavesdropping in the *cafe* was also unknown to him; but he had found on the table the terrible note of revelation and warning which Judith had left there in her rage.

This discovery was soon followed by another. He found out that Gogol had escaped, but this rather amused him.

"That boy is the plague of her life," laughed Captain Holofernes. "She is the person most anxious to catch him, and Ivan was playing trap for her, not for me. So I am in the shadow! So the witch of the Centipede has condemned me because I choose to snatch a beautiful creature from her clutches! Look out, woman! You may find your match in Captain Holofernes. Ivan has eyes and ears open. Ivan is no longer in your employ. He belongs to me."

Ivan!

If Captain Holofernes could have seen the spy while he talked of him—if he could have seen the shriveled hands and the pain-distorted face, he might have fallen back with an exclamation of horror.

The crippled spy sat in a ghostly light, looking at his hands, one of which was damaged. Every now and then he ground his teeth and growled in horrible curses, listened to by a woman who had watched him for half an hour, letting him have his own way and saying nothing.

Ivan had gone to this woman after his adventure with the death reptile.

She was a native of his own country and occupied a small room in the Russian quarter, and not far from the boarding-house to which we once followed Silent Sam.

Whatever the relations existing between the pair were, the woman knew enough to keep silent when Ivan was cursing the creature who was responsible for his affliction. She could look on, now at the useless hands, and now into his face and read eyes as they were revealed by the light which came up into the room from the lamp on the sidewalk.

"That's what one gets for trying to serve two masters at once."

Ivan looked at the woman and held forth his hands.

"So you've said before," was the answer.

"Ah! I had forgotten. You see I can't hold anything. A dagger would fall from my clutch, and a knout, even if I had one, would follow suit. But, I have my teeth left."

He grinned like a wolf, showing his teeth in a manner which seemed to strike the woman's fancy.

"The reptile didn't deprive me of their use," he went on. "They can bite like the teeth of the wolves that infest the steppes of our country, Volka. Without my hands I can tear the beautiful white throat of that female devil. And I will!"

He leant toward her with ferocious expression.

"You must look out," ventured the woman.

"For the woman with the sting?—for the Countess Orloff—the knouted lady of the empire?"

"Yes."

"So I will. From to-night I will do nothing else. I serve but one master now—the demon Revenge! What can atone for these hands? Her blood! her life! Nothing else!"

Ivan left his chair and caught at a hat that lay on a cot near by, but it fell from his touch and he ground forth another curse.

"Put it on for me, Volka," he said.

"No, no! You must not go forth after her to-night. Wait until your hand heals. It may not be so bad as the other. It may have strength enough to hold something."

"To clutch—to tear her throat, think you, girl?"

"Perhaps."

"If I thought so I'd wait a year—a thousand of them!" exclaimed Ivan. "Tell me truly that I will have the use of that reptile-bitten hand, and I will remain with you."

"I believe you will," answered the Russian woman assuringly. "It looked much better when I dressed it last."

"The fire drew it so," said Ivan. "I don't know how long I held it in the flames to burn the poison out of my veins, but until I fainted; that much I know. And you think it will hold a throat or a dagger if I wait, Volka? By heavens, girl, you send my blood through all my veins like a stream of lava fire! Wait! after what I have suffered? Wait with that woman planning for final and complete victory?" He looked steadily at Volka, his companion, for several seconds and then finished:

"I will wait—a few hours! We will know something by to-morrow. You shall give my one hand constant attention. The other one is useless for life, and I have not much hope for the one last struck. But it may hold something for her destruction, it may carry to her bosom one of her accursed reptiles. Ah! that would be vengeance terrible, eh, Volka?"

The woman, she was past thirty, though he sometimes called her girl, laughed with him, and he went to the window and looked down into the street.

As we have said, Captain Holofernes was totally ignorant of this scene.

He believed Ivan still on the trail for him, despite the words of the warning left by Judith on his table. She had said that the spy was dead, but he believed nothing of the sort.

She did not know that Ivan was playing for him, therefore it was plain falsehood invented for the purpose of terrorizing him.

He believed himself, with what he knew of her ways and secrets, a match for the Queen of the League.

He would rescue Nelly Mascot in spite of the sentence of the Centipede. The threat of a woman like Judith should not deter him.

A few hours after his interview with Major Mascot in Captain Totem's late quarters, Captain Holofernes left his house and proceeded rapidly down street.

Half an hour later a carriage stopped in front of Major Mascot's mansion and the well dressed man who alighted tripped lightly up the steps and eagerly jerked the bell.

A minute afterward he heard footsteps in the hall and the door opening from within brought him face to face with Nelly herself.

The girl started on seeing the handsome man who met her gaze.

She had never met Captain Holofernes unmasked, but as she had not forgotten the eyes which looked out from behind the velvet the night of her adventure with the man with the hidden face, she felt that she now faced him again.

A strange desire to tell Captain Holofernes that she would not be a party to the compact which involved more than her rescue from the Centipede took possession of her while she faced the occupant of the step.

He found her alone, Major Mascot having gone out an hour before, and they could not be interrupted by any one.

Captain Holofernes found himself in the parlor face to face with Nelly.

She had never before looked so beautiful. There was a freshness about her that charmed him and secretly renewed the vow he had taken to win her by baffling Judith of the League.

"Major Mascot," began the girl, "is not at home. He need not be here to inform me of the import of your visit. You are Captain Holofernes."

The mate of the Queen of the Centipede seemed to recoil.

It was not his intention to appear to Nelly Mascot in his true garb.

"Do I startle you?" continued the girl, with a smile. "There shall be no secrets in this interview on my part. I have seen you before. I have met you under your own roof, but we need not go back to that interview. You have come to do me a service."

"As you have been informed, in part, of what has taken place, I will say frankly that your welfare has brought me to this house."

"To rescue me from what is known as the Centipede League?"

"To save you from the Shadow!"

Nelly, looking at the eager face of Captain Holofernes, did not answer for a moment.

"What was the compact, anyhow?" she asked.

"The compact?"

"Yes. You have seen him. You have met Major Mascot. As Captain Holofernes, for years a member of the League—as the sworn brother of the woman known in Russia by one name—in this country by another—you are not the man to come to me with an offer of salvation without some recompense in view. Hear me through." Nelly's uplifted hand kept back the words forming on his lips.

"You place yourself in the shadow the moment you extend the hand of sympathy," she continued. "You break the law of the League the second you think of rescuing me. You have served Judith until now, helping her in a thousand and one dark schemes. When did you offer to save any victim before now? I have been 'in the shadow,' as you call it, a long time; I am there yet."

"Indeed you are!" cried Captain Holofernes putting in at the first opportunity that presented itself. "If I am the man you describe—if I do bear the name you mentioned—I have still a right to save you from the doom hanging over your head."

"At the expense of the penalty incurred by treason?"

The girl's words stirred him.

"You will associate me with the League?" he smiled.

"On my part there shall be no secrets between us," was the response. "I know where I stand. Where there has been darkness is now light. I know more now than I knew a month ago. Captain Holofernes, I decline to be rescued by any one belonging to the Centipede!"

If a bomb had fallen at the captain's feet he would not have been more startled.

The decision had come without warning, though her previous sentences ought to have prepared him for something of a surprising nature.

He lost color though his eyes snapped viciously, and his olive hands clinched convulsively at his sides.

"This is foolhardiness!" he exclaimed when he found his tongue. "I am the only person

who can offer rescue. I come to you at the risk of my own existence. I am Captain Holofernes, so called. I know the plans, the trails, the secret powers of the Queen of the Centipede. I am tired of its accursed thralldom. I have broken with it. I am a traitor for the oath-bound purpose of saving you. I can beat down the hand in the shadow—I can blunt the sting of the death reptile. I swear to you, girl, that you must be saved by Captain Holofernes, or you will perish as others have perished before you."

Nelly heard this impassioned speech standing erect as a statue, with a marble face, and eyes fixed on the man of the League.

She waited until the last word had died away.

"Then I perish!" said she with startling calmness. "I have made up my mind. I will not be saved by any one who has taken the oath of the Centipede. Captain Holofernes, there are other hands than yours. There are hands which are at work now in spite of the traps and pitfalls of the League. You may go back to Judith, the beautiful Muscovite, and serve her once more, or cut loose from her forever—just as you like. Your time here is time wasted. The sting of the reptile is already blunted. I am already saved!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER HAND IN THE FIRE.

CAPTAIN HOLOFERNES, thus unexpectedly met by Nelly, seemed to have lost his tongue again.

"I reject assistance at your hands," she went on, even before her last words had ceased to ring in his ears. "The Centipede is to be cheated of its prey but not by the hands of him who has served it. Captain Holofernes, with thanks for your offer, I refuse it."

"To your eternal detriment," blurted out the man of the League, his hand coming up in emphasis while he spoke.

"Be it so," answered Nelly with a smile.

"You have spurned the only hand which can draw you safely from the shadow!"

"In your judgment," rejoined the girl.

"In the judgment of one who knows."

"I accept the risk."

"Then perish!"

The face of the speaker was a picture of darkened rage.

He gave the statuesque girl another look and turned toward the door.

The next moment Nelly stood alone.

Captain Holofernes was gone, and with him had departed the disgusting chill of his presence.

He looked back at the house as though with a glance he would demolish it, sprung into the carriage in which he had hoped to convey Nelly Mascot to a place of "safety," and gave the driver orders in quick, harsh tones.

The man jolted in the carriage over the streets of New York for half an hour.

At the end of that time he tapped on the glass before him, and gave the driver an order, which took the horses down the first cross-street they came to.

Captain Holofernes alighted near the sidewalk and walked away.

In a short time he ran up three stone steps and jerked a knocker.

There was no answer.

"Not in, eh? I'll see what I can do."

He drew from his pocket a key that unlocked the house. Entering, he shut the door behind him, and making his way down a hall which was dark enough to be provided with a light, which it was not, he found another door, which he opened in the same manner.

Now Captain Holofernes struck a light and revealed the room.

He was in Duval's workshop, but the centipede-maker was not there to greet him.

"Not at home!" thought the captain, casting his eyes around. "If I could get into the safe, I would not care whether he came or no. I want one of the toys—want it badly. There is going to be some sharp work from now on."

He crossed the room, which was small, and knelt before the safe.

In another moment his fingers had the knob in their clutch and were manipulating it while he looked and listened with a smile on his face.

"If it's the old combination he used in the other house, I'll win," he murmured. "Duval may have changed it—Ha! that's a familiar click! I believe I have it!"

He pulled on the heavy door, and lo! it swung open, letting the light falling over his shoulder enter the interior of the safe.

Captain Holofernes had won just when he was thinking of giving up the task.

For a moment he looked at the array of pigeon-holes with a gleam of triumph, then his hand, darting forward, took a little box from one of them.

"It is a finished one!" he said, looking into the box, whose lid had slipped on pressure. "It needs nothing more at Duval's hands. The little reservoir is empty, but a drop fills it, and I guess I can supply that."

He pocketed the box, closed the safe, and left the house as noiselessly as he had entered it.

Half an hour later he stood in the library of the Centipede's home.

Unlocking his own safe, he took from its deepest nook a tiny vial wrapped in black velvet. Carrying this to the table he produced the box and lifted from it what seemed a living, writhing centipede.

Captain Holofernes laughed at the reptile's contortions, but placing it on the cloth before him, opened a little door in its back, and, with the aid of a blade of his penknife, conveyed a drop of fluid from the vial into the opening.

This accomplished, he replaced the vial in the safe, which he shut, and went back to the repulsive-looking object left on the table.

"This arms me against all foes!" he exclaimed, leaning forward. "The girl rejects my offer of help. She has a champion. Let me find him! Show me the man who has stepped between me and Major Mascot's ward!"

A moment later he took up the reptile, but without that care which he should have exercised.

He pressed it too hard, or else did not catch it fairly, for in an instant it turned in his hand like a living centipede, and a cry leaped from his throat.

"What! would you sting your master?" cried Captain Holofernes, seizing the reptile with the other hand and jerking it loose. "Before God, I believe the poison is already in my blood!"

The centipede had fallen to the floor, and he was staring, white-faced and breathless, at a reddish spot at the root of his little finger.

"It caught me there. I see the mark. I feel a strange heat in my blood!" he went on, gaspingly. "Ivan told me that he once burnt the poison out of his system by thrusting the wounded member into a flame."

The man of the League ground his teeth, and looked at the gas-jet burning above the table.

"Better have a hand like Ivan's than die miserably here by the sting of the accursed reptile, before I have played one of the cards I hold," he cried.

He thrust his hand into the flame, holding it there, with the wound in the heart of the fire, and with his eyes fixed upon it and his teeth together.

With the other hand he clung to the table, lest the terrible torture should drive him back or weaken his nerves. A horrible odor of burning flesh—his own—assailed his nostrils. He was white, but he did not quail.

"The devil invented this antidote!" he said at last. "But if it is effective I'll thank him all the same!"

By and by he removed his hand, which was a huge blister, looked at it and laughed like a demon.

"Burned out, but not forgotten!" cried he. "I am now proof against the sting of the reptile!"

In another minute he had lifted the centipede from the floor and replaced it in the box. Then he wrapped the injured hand in cloths saturated with sweet oil, and with his surgery complete, left the house.

He now imitated Ivan in carrying one of his hands in his pocket. He still felt the torture to which he had subjected himself, but he bit his lips to keep back any outcry of pain, and became another of the many people passing under the lights of Gotham.

Captain Holofernes walked with a rapid step. He did not trust himself to the lights of the cars, but avoided such means of travel as though they were fatal to his plans.

He soon surprised a man in an office which contained a commonplace desk and several chairs.

"I don't need your services any longer," he said, addressing this individual who was the detective whom he had hired in the *cafe* on the occasion of Duval's eavesdropping to discover the facts connected with Nelly's past life.

"What! have you played shadow yourself and beaten me?" exclaimed the private ferret.

"No, I've changed my mine, that's all," and Captain Holofernes took from his pocket a roll of bills.

Did the detective observe that he used but one hand? Did he notice that even when he was separating the notes in an awkward manner he kept his left hand in his pocket? May be not.

Captain Holofernes paid off the detective and went bustling out.

"I've done with men of that class!" he mentally exclaimed. "Henceforward I'm my own hound, my own shadow, and I'll play the role to the end."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BOOTLESS QUEST.

LET us return to Judith of the League—the reptile-armed creature whom we saw last, waiting like a tigress in ambush for the detective.

She had shadowed Silent Sam to the old quarters and believing that he would not remain long up-stairs, had taken her station in the dark hallway with the strange death-agent in her hand.

Her plan was simply this: When the unsuspecting detective should reach the foot of the flight she would dart upon him, throw him with

one hand against the opposite wall and thrust against his throat the sting of the mechanical centipede.

Moments seemed hours to the Queen of the League.

She heard the occasional pedestrian as he flitted past the door, but his step had no charms for her.

At last a footstep overhead sent a torrent of hot blood coursing swiftly through her heart, and her brain throbbed wildly for a moment.

The Shadow Sphinx was coming. Her vigil had not been for naught.

The footfalls, certainly those of a man from their sound, approached the top of the steps. In another moment a form dimly seen appeared there.

It was Silent Sam!

Judith did not take her eyes from her prey.

In a little while tramp, tramp came the figure down the steps.

The woman in the shadows nerved herself for the charge. She mentally counted the beats of her heart as she tried to calculate how many would intervene between the present and the thrilling future so near at hand.

All at once the man on the stairway stopped.

He was a little more than half-way down.

To Judith's alarm he drew a match across the wall.

"Heavens!" she thought. "I am discovered now!"

But it was not so.

The match flaring up threw the shadow of the man upon her and held it there while he coolly lit a cigar and enveloped himself in a cloud of fragrant smoke.

Before the match was discarded Judith had made another discovery.

The man was not Silent Sam but quite another person.

He had dark hair all over his face: he looked taller than the detective. She had waited an hour to encounter one whom she did not know!

The discarded match fell at Judith's feet and the man came on again.

She seemed to sink into the wall hard as it was.

He brushed her and passed out, and not until then did she breathe free once more.

Judith resumed her watch for the Shadow Sphinx, but not with the patience she had exhibited.

After awhile she crept up the steps and found the door of the detective's room, as Ivan had described it for her.

She listened there and heard nothing.

"What if the bearded man was the ferret?" she suddenly thought. "What a fool I have been! I believe I had the Sphinx in my grip and let him slip through."

The more she thought thus the stronger became her convictions that this was so.

Captain Sam, knowing that she had found out the secret of his escape from Duval's trap, would naturally assume a disguise to play out the hand he held.

The black beard was but a mask; he had come to his old quarters for the sole purpose of changing his appearance. In other words, he has deceived her in a manner that made her hate herself.

Judith put the centipede back in the box.

"I ought to lose the game after this failure of the net," she exclaimed. "I have let the enemy hoodwink me. But," her eyes suddenly brightened, "I know who to look for. The match revealed him in the mask. Let me find the man with the jet-black beard and I have him. It is a long lane that turns not, Captain Sphinx. You have deceived me for a spell; but you have not shaken off the Centipede."

Assured by her thoughts and sundry observations that the quarry had escaped, Judith turned about and quitted the house.

She had lost time and patience, but her vengeance had lost nothing.

Baffled for the time, Judith went home.

Letting herself in with her night-key she entered the library and turned on the light.

Captain Holofernes was not there.

"Not at home!" laughed the Queen of the League. "I wonder if he has taken flight—abandoned to her fate the creature he would rescue? He has found the warning. He knows that the double-dealing is not a secret of his. I know the truth. I forced it from Ivan before I paid the traitor for his treachery! If I had not missed the shadow ferret to-night! Never mind! the bite of the Centipede is not lessened by having been postponed."

Judith turned from the room and was on the wide staircase when the key which she heard slipped into the lock below gave a slight click.

In an instant she paused and waited.

The next moment the door opened and Captain Holofernes came in.

Judith almost leant forward in her eagerness to mark him well.

"A short tether, traitor," passed through her mind. "A brief play with the cards you have foolishly assumed and then—the penalty!"

Captain Holofernes did not look up. If he had raised his eyes, he would have seen the motionless figure on the stair, and there would have been a scene.

But locking the door he passed into the library and filled it with a glow of light.

Judith moved higher and bending over the balustrade gazed down into the room through the transom.

Her eyes gleamed, her bosom rose and fell with excitement she could not suppress, and while she watched Captain Holofernes her hands seemed to tear at the wood they grasped.

"I made him!" she cried under her breath.

"He would be rotting in a foreign dungeon if I had not rescued him. The vultures of the tropics might be soaring over his skeleton if I had not stretched forth my hand. Some men don't know what gratitude is. They would crush the hand of their benefactor as though it were the head of a viper. He is one of that brood. He is even now plotting for my destruction. Why not deal the first blow? He—what has hurt him? His hand is bandaged. When did an accident befall Captain Holofernes?"

Judith had been watching the man below without a second's cessation. Not one of his movements had escaped her.

She saw him bend over the table and unbandage his hand.

"A thousand curses on the woman and her reptile!" she heard him exclaim.

"Ah! he has been stung!" Judith laughed.

"They say that fire, if immediately applied, will destroy the bite of my pet. But where did he find a charged sting? I am the possessor of the death secret. I have never shared that with him. No one but myself carries the reptile ready for its work. Yet, he shows a burned hand, and while he looks at it he curses me and the centipede."

Judith's excitement carried her to the foot of the stair.

She went down step by step with the velvet softness of the panther.

The door stood slightly ajar, and beyond it she saw the figure of Captain Holofernes at the table.

The Queen of the Centipede opened the door and stood on the threshold with her coal-like eyes riveted on the man ahead.

She seemed to gloat on him as a tiger gloats on the fawn in the shadow of its death leap.

The following moment she took a step forward.

"Good-night, captain!"

Captain Holofernes dropped the oiled bandage and straightened with a sharp cry.

It took him but an instant to see the beautiful woman who had thrilled him in every nerve, and for a moment he stared at her as though she had been dead, but had come back from the grave.

"You have met with an accident," said she, with a sarcasm not to be concealed.

"I have! But for you and the infernal weapon you carry that hand would be as sound as its mate!"

He thrust the blistered member forward, holding it in the light of the same flame which had marred it, and looked over it into her face.

"You know how the reptile can sting!" answered Judith. "If you had remained loyal that hand would not now be a witness of ingratitude and treason."

"Enough!"

"No, not enough!" and the words seemed to come from the depths of a seared soul. "I am alone against the world, but in spite of treason and the shadow detectives of two continents, I am still the Queen of the Reptile League! Stand where you are, traitor. Move a foot before I finish and the maimed hand shall belong to a corpse!" And the beautiful creature, with eyes that emphasized the terrible threat, looked fairer and deadlier than ever before.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GOGOL'S MOTHER.

SILENT SAM, who, in the disguise he had assumed in the old quarters, had avoided an encounter with Judith in ambush, had resolved to bring the long and exciting trail to a close.

He had link by link forged a chain which he believed could not be broken. He had followed the Centipede Trail from the finding of Pagin's body in the river to the terrible fate which had overtaken the spy, Ivan.

In every act and all along that trail he had seen the hand of the most dreaded of women. He had discovered Judith's past history; he knew her Russian intrigues; Mensikoff, the young exile, had let light in upon some dark places, and the document found by Gogol in Madame Gorgon's house had added another link to the chain.

Besides this, Nelly Mascot had contrived to keep him informed as to late events. Captain Holofernes had not left the girl an hour after her rejection of his offer of rescue before the whole story of the interview was in the detective's possession.

It was soon after Judith's failure to meet him in the ambush where we saw her with the deadly reptile of the Order in her hand that the Shadow Sphinx might have been seen closeted with Gogol in a small room which had the looks and shape of a back apartment.

In spite of the black beard which still covered his face, his identity had been solved by the

sharp-eyed boy, and a voice heard suddenly at his side, had caused him to look down into the eyes of Gogol.

"My boy," said Silent Sam, "I want you to go back to Russia."

"How far back?"

"To the beginning of your recollection."

"That's not very far, Captain Sam."

"Perhaps not, Gogol."

The boy fixed his eyes on the city ferret and waited for him to proceed.

"What do you know about your father?"

Gogol started.

"Nothing."

"How, nothing?" cried the detective. "You were growing up when you came away with Pagin."

"A good chunk of a boy," grinned Gogol. "Pagin wasn't my father. I know that."

"Certainly not."

"My mother. I see her dimly. A beautiful woman with a fine shape and with eyes that shone like the czar's diamonds. If Captain Holofernes had carried out his first resolve and held before me the portrait he took from the safe, I am sure I should have recognized it."

"Do you think it was her picture, Gogol?"

"I am sure of it. But he changed his mind, and I did not get to see it. What do you know about my parentage, Captain Sam? Don't you think the time for me to know something has come?"

The suddenness with which Gogol turned inquisitor startled the detective.

"You told me once that it should not always remain a secret," the boy went on.

"It shall not."

"But I'm impatient, you see," was the response. "I've had my eyes wide open of late. I've been in prison—shut up in the web of the Centipede, and even there my eyes and ears have been of some service to me. Captain Sam, I am not merely Gogol, the waif. I have another name. Sometimes my blood catches fire as it were. Whenever I see the woman whom we call Judith—and I've seen her several times—once in Major Mascot's house, and twice on the street, I am thrilled; I can't tell you how. She is a Russian. I have found that out. She is at the head of the Centipede League whose mission now is to destroy the house of Mascot. Why?"

There was no answer, though Gogol was locking straight into the detective's face.

"You don't answer me," continued Gogol, springing up and coming forward. "You sit there with your secret well-kept. You know how to hold what you have, Captain Sam. The old Sphinx keeps its secrets and so do you. But I will go mad if I don't know the whole truth soon. You have asked me to go back and recall something about my life in Russia. My first recollections are of Pagin and a home in a small town among the Urals, many miles from St. Petersburg. I held myself above the boys of the place because I felt that my blood was better than theirs. Pagin in unguarded moments intimated that I was no peasant. We left the little town in the night. We traveled many miles in a closed sled and at a gait which suggested pursuit. We reached the boundary of the empire and came to this country. Pagin seemed to fear Siberia, or the czar's vengeance in another form. Pagin died here. You know that, Captain Sam. It was the sight of his corpse fished from the river by the water vultures that started you on the Centipede's trail. You were not long finding Judith and Captain Holofernes. I saw the captain awhile ago."

"You, Gogol?"

"Why not? What are my eyes for but to see?"

"True. What was the captain doing?"

"He got out of a carriage and ran up a flight of steps which takes one to the office of 'Reuben Girard, Private Detective,' that's what the sign says, anyhow."

"Hunting a ferret himself, eh?"

"It looks like it. He wasn't disguised, Captain Sam, though one of his hands he carried in his pocket all the time. I left him with Reuben Girard."

The Shadow Sphinx asked no further questions concerning Captain Holofernes.

"I'm coming back to the subject nearest my heart," resumed Gogol. "It will consume me if the flame is not soon extinguished. Do you want to go back to the trail?"

"I can humor you a little while."

"Captain Sam, you have made everything clear in your own mind," the boy went on, his deep eyes riveted penetratingly on the detective. "You know how Madame Gorgon died, you know who killed Pagin, and as clear as the noon-day trail to you are the paths of the Centipede."

"You compliment me, boy," smiled Sam.

"You deserve it!" exclaimed Gogol. "You have promised to rescue Nelly from the death shadow and you will. You never fail, Captain Sam. But I must ask you a question which I can't keep back longer. It burns into my brain like a flame started by some demon."

Gogol leaned forward and his hand dropped upon the detective's shoulder and rested there.

The eyes of the two friends met.

"Is the Queen of the Centipede my mother?"

Despite his coolness, Silent Sam recoiled until Gogol's hand, falling from his shoulder, dropped at his side.

"For the love of heaven, give me a sign!" cried the boy. "Am I the child of this cold-blooded tigress of the North? You know, Captain Sam. You can say 'yes' or 'no,' and allay or increase the fever of excitement that is devouring me. Pity your little friend Gogol. He has yearned for a mother's love all these years, and even though that mother be a tigress, he would know the truth. Pagin would tell me nothing. Whenever I broached the subject he would seize my wrist and, looking into my eyes, would say: 'Gogol, my child, you must forget!'"

The picture presented by the boy standing in the center of the room pained the detective more than words could tell.

"One word—'yes' or 'no.' It is all I ask!" Gogol went on, his hands clasped and his face without a vestige of color left. "You can't refuse me this, Captain Sam. I have watched for you; I have done what I could on the trail; I found the hidden paper in Madame Gorgor's house and turned it over to you. Will you keep back the truth now? The trail is at its end. You have but to close in and destroy the Centipede before it deals Nelly the death-blow. You will go from this room to the last cast of the dice of fortune, but *don't* leave me with the fire of suspense raging in my breast."

It was an appeal strong enough to move a heart of stone, and the Shadow Sphinx had no such organ in his body.

He sprang up and caught the boy in his arms. He felt the arms of Gogol encircle his neck, and the white cheek came close to his false black beard.

"It is the only secret I ever tried to rob you of, Captain Sam," said the boy.

A moment of dead silence followed these words, and then it was broken by the detective's voice sunk to a whisper, for his lips were close to Gogol's ear.

"Judith, my boy—once the Countess Orloff—is your mother!"

A long sigh escaped from Gogol's heart, and his arms loosening from about the detective's neck, let him fall back with a look the Shadow Sphinx will never forget.

"My mother!" was all he said.

Captain Sam saw him sink into the chair he had just left and bury his face in his hands.

The boy sat thus until the detective's footsteps startled him.

"You are going to finish the trail?" he asked. "Why not, Gogol? Would you have me quit it now?"

"I would not. To give up now would be to blight the fame you have already won. You know where *she* lurks. She cannot fly from you, but she would not if she could, Captain Sam. Judith will stand her ground. Though chased to the wall, she is dangerous still. Remember, you have not disarmed her. She wields the same dread weapon, the possession of which has made her invincible. You must beware of—*my mother!*"

The detective saw the effort that it cost Gogol to speak as he had spoken.

"Forget that she is such," said he. "She is the Queen of the Centipede. You were abandoned by that mother. She wears on her back the autograph of the emperor, placed there by the knout. That woman—"

"Don't!" interrupted Gogol, throwing up his hands. "I can't forget what she is, but her plots—I call them by no other name—cannot obliterate our relationship. My mother! Have I waited all these years for a love like yours? Is this the ending of my dreams? For one kiss, for one word of affection, I'd fly to your arms and nestle there, though I'd be going to the embrace of a tigress!"

Silent Sam went to the door, but looked back at Gogol as he laid his hand on the latch.

The boy had resumed his attitude of mingled shame and grief, and leaving him thus the Shadow Sphinx went out and down to the street with the strangest feeling he had known for years.

Gogol did not stir until the tread of the detective was no longer heard.

When he looked up, showing his face in the light, it seemed that ten additional years had suddenly set their stamp upon his brow.

He said nothing, but with compressed and bloodless lips, went to the window as if looking for the man who had deserted him.

All at once he turned back and strode like an impatient young tiger to the door.

"I must go!" said he. "No matter what she is now, she is the mother of Gogol! The man on her trail is merciless, as he should be. He must save Nelly at all hazards. That is right. Captain Sam is in the shadow of the Centipede with the rest of them. But I must see her. I must stand face to face with Judith, the Countess Orloff. What if she spurns me? She may place against me the death reptile and hold it there until the deadly poison reaches my heart. All love may not have left her bosom. Happen what may, I must come between my mother and the Shadow Sphinx of Gotham!"

The next moment the little room was deserted.

Gogol was on the street flitting under the lamps and hastening to carry out the mad desire which had taken possession of him.

He did not stop to think, even if he knew, that the creature whom he sought was the person who had set Ivan the spy on his track.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DEEP IN THE SHADOW.

NELLY MASCOT, the nabob's ward, had such faith in the Shadow Sphinx that she felt herself already saved from the sting of the Centipede.

She had rejected Captain Holofernes's offer of assistance—rejected it with loathing for the man who had broken his oath and turned traitor for the purpose of getting her in his clutches.

She was once more alone in the house and the hour was verging on toward midnight.

A deathlike silence brooded in all the rooms and the girl wondered what the several players in the deep drama of which she was a part were doing.

Suddenly the musical tones of the bell caught her ear. She ran from the room and leaning over the balustrade looked down into the hall and listened.

For the moment she forgot that she was her own servant, the only tenant of the house at the time.

When this fact came back to her mind she went down and advanced to the door.

If she could have looked through the heavy panels and seen who stood on the steps instead of opening the door she would have recoiled with a white face and chilled with horror.

But thinking that the Sphinx, and her champion, had come with the tidings she felt was liable to reach her at any time, she pushed the bolt and opened the portal.

In another instant she had regretted the step—when it was too late.

Nelly fell back with a half-stifled cry as a figure sprang across the threshold and a hand seemed to encircle her wrist like an eagle's talons.

"Silence!" said a voice. "It is death to loosen that tongue of yours."

Well did Nelly know into the clutches of what hawk she had fallen.

The hand of Judith was at her wrist! The eyes of the Centipede Queen were looking triumphantly into her face!

"Come!" continued Judith.

"With you?" stammered Nelly.

"With me!"

"If you mean out on the street, I must have my hat."

The netted dove—poor thing—thought to get away from that grip for a moment, but the intended stratagem did not work.

"You need no hat to accompany me," broke in Judith, with a heartlessness that destroyed Nelly's hopes. "I came prepared. Come."

Nelly was led from the house toward a carriage which stood under the branches of the trees on the sidewalk.

"In heaven's name, where is Captain Sam now?" thought the terrorized girl. "Perhaps this creature struck him before she came for me."

She was pushed into the vehicle, Judith sprang in after her, shutting the door with a bang, and the horses started.

Not for a moment had that hand left her wrist. It was there in the darkness of the carriage, and Nelly sunk back among the cushions ready to give up everything.

On, on went the carriage, jolting over twenty crossings before it gave forth signs of stopping.

"Remember!" admonished Judith, speaking for the first time during the ride. "Not a word or a sign. We are going to stop."

Nelly's heart gave a little throb of joy.

A minute afterward she was helped out and conducted into a house which she felt was not the same in which she met Captain Holofernes in the mask. But no difference. The house was controlled by the Queen of the Centipede, and that was enough.

It was not until the nabob's ward had been led into a room dimly lighted that Judith loosened her grip.

Nelly staggered back and sunk into a chair while the woman of the League gazed at her with glittering eyes.

"Nicely caught, eh, my bird?" laughed Judith. "What is the cunning and the power of traitors and detectives when matched with mine? Once in my web always there! A fly has never been known to escape."

Nelly could believe this now.

"What have I done!" she cried, springing up and facing Judith.

"You belong to the doomed house!" was the answer.

"I am not her child."

"No, but he loves you as such."

That was true. Nelly could not gainsay this. Major Mascot loved her as though she were of his own flesh and blood.

"You won't sting me with the reptile, will you?" asked Nelly.

A laugh broke over Judith's lips.

"Ha! you know, then?" she exclaimed.

"Yes."

"You know and fear the secret power held only by the person who stands before you. If I had not wanted you I would not have sought you in the nest he made for the child he picked up years ago. You can't escape the doom decreed by the Centipede. They have various names for me, but after all I am Judith of the Sting. This house hides everything. Nobody knows that I hold the key, and the Phoenix does not suspect that I ever crossed its steps."

Judith fell back to the table which occupied the center of the room and took coolly from her bosom a little box which fascinated Nelly from the moment of its appearance.

A nameless shudder swept over her frame.

The Queen of the Centipede opened the box, and took therefrom a wriggling reptile at sight of which Nelly Mascot fell back.

It was the dreaded centipede.

Judith held the reptile between finger and thumb so that Nelly could see it in all its suggestive hideousness.

"It bites and all is over!" exclaimed the reptile queen. "To be sure the victim writhes a little, but the end is unaccompanied with pain."

The centipede was replaced in the box and Judith, secretly enjoying the fear which the exhibition had inspired in the girl, withdrew and left her alone.

Nelly had not looked for this, and the withdrawal sent a thrill of hope along every nerve.

She crossed the yielding carpet to the door but it was locked.

Coming back she went to one of the windows and tried to raise the sash, but in vain.

She was a prisoner in the last dread web of the adventuress—a fly waiting to be crushed.

For a moment she stood at the window with her heart fluttering in her bosom like a bird beating the bars of its cage.

Judith was liable to return at any moment, and when she came—what?

But one answer, and only one, came to the girl's mind.

"The centipede!"

As the full horror of her situation forced itself upon her, she felt her very heart-strings give way and at last with a moan she fell back from the window and sinking to the floor passed into a darkness which was the close counterfeit of death!

Meantime in another part of the city a man was following a trail to the prosecution of which he had long before called his every energy.

Captain Sam, quitting Gogol, who had wormed from him a secret he had guarded so well, was searching for the Queen of the League.

To find her, to confront her with the proof he had, was to finish the game.

After awhile he appeared on the steps of Captain Holofernes's residence.

The bell which he caused to tinkle in the hall produced no response beyond its echo, which died away half ominously.

The shutters were drawn and the house was dark.

"A deserted nest, eh?" exclaimed Sam, looking up at the mansion. "We will see."

Five minutes later he appeared in the small back yard attached to the house.

He slipped down the steps of the basement and effected an entrance by means of a window there.

Not long afterward the Shadow Sphinx might have been seen in a hallway which led to the library so well known to the reader.

The door stood an inch ajar.

Thus far he had discovered nothing.

If Judith was lurking in the dark corners of the house the centipede might be thrown upon him at any time, and it was to protect himself from an attack of this kind that he had turned his collar up.

Silent Sam found the library dark.

Reaching the table he struck a match and looked with all eyes the moment the little flame leaped into being.

The first thing he saw was the steel safe with the door wide open.

The detective sprang toward it and held the light close.

The safe had been rifled, not hurriedly but with deliberate coolness. Whoever had done the job had taken his time.

Nothing had been left that struck the Shadow Sphinx's fancy, and he turned back. Had Captain Holofernes been robbed, or had he plundered himself and withdrawn from the game?

Silent Sam went up-stairs to Judith's room. It had been visited before him, and stripped with that care which had accompanied the plundering of the steel safe.

"The web is deserted!" said the detective, and he went back and thence into the night, but not with discouragement.

The Shadow Sphinx never dropped a trail short of its end.

On the street and nearly a square from Judith's house he was touched by a hand that felt familiar.

Silent Sam looked down.

"You here, Gogol?" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" answered the boy. "You have lost her. But I have found her."

The detective started.

"You will find her in time—I know that," continued Gogol. "Luck has been with me to-night. I thought I would confront her, knowing what I do, but I give her—my tigress mother—over to you. Here!"

He slipped a bit of paper into the ferret's hand and vanished.

Captain Sam looked at it and read:
"Number 662, S— street."

CHAPTER XL.

OUT OF THE SHADOW.

THE Shadow Sphinx seemed inclined to doubt what he saw.

He held in his hand what purported to be a certain clew to the present whereabouts of Judith, of the League.

Gogol, after delivering the address, had left him without a word of explanation beyond the mere statement that he had found his mother.

But there had been no interview.

The Russian boy had changed his mind at the last moment. He had resolved to hand his mother over to the law, which act meant vengeance and death.

Silent Sam put the paper away and turned back.

If Judith had taken rooms at 662 S— street, the last place he would have thought of looking for her, she had concluded to continue the battle to the close.

She was now a tigress in hiding, armed with deadly power, and as merciless as ever.

The Shadow Sphinx found Major Mascot's house in his way to the place occupied by Judith.

He ran up the steps and lifted the knocker.

A light seen through the library window told him that the nabob was either there or not far off.

Sam felt like breaking the news of his discovery to the inmates of the mansion.

On the last quarter of the trail! Going even then to arrest Judith, the Centipede Queen! Closing in on the quarry which he had followed so long through light and shadow!

The news would delight Major Mascot. It would brighten Nelly's face.

He could not have passed the house by if he had wished to do so.

There was a sound of quick feet in the hallway beyond the door, and in a moment the detective was confronted by Major Mascot.

"Nelly?" cried the nabob, springing forward and seizing his arm. "Where is she?"

In an instant Silent Sam's look had become a wild stare.

"Nelly?" he echoed.

"The girl has disappeared!" cried Major Mascot. "I left her here alone since dark. She has fallen into the hands of the deadly foe! Come in."

The Shadow Sphinx was dragged bodily into the library, where Major Mascot released his arm and dropped heavily upon his chair.

"I tell you the trap has caught her at last!" he exclaimed, looking up at Sam. "I know it, and yet, like a dastard, I've sat here an hour unnerved. She was taken away by a woman. A carriage was driven to the door and Nelly accompanied the tigress to it, and was driven off. How do I know? Neighbors have eyes and ears, and they were not closed to-night. I tell you—"

"To-morrow, or when I come back!" broke in the detective.

"What! did you know—"

"Of the swoop? No."

"But—"

"No more! The trail must end to-night, or never!"

"Nelly! Nelly! Would to God the shadow had never fallen! She has promised to bestow her own sweet self upon the man who breaks the accursed spell of the Centipede. You must hear me, Captain Sam. I don't know where you have been, nor how you managed to escape the sting of the reptile." Major Mascot had sprung erect and his hand had fastened once more on the detective's arm in a grip that could not be shaken off.

"Be brief!" admonished Sam. "There's death in the reptile's tail, and Nelly is in the web!"

"My God!" cried Mascot, falling back. "I kill her by holding you here! Go!—go!" and Silent Sam was pushed almost headlong toward the door, and the next instant he was on the sidewalk, while Major Mascot had gone back to his chair without a steady nerve in his frame.

Meantime, the fly in the Centipede's lair had been left alone in the locked room with a dreadful fate hanging over her.

She knew not when Judith would come back, but felt that when she came the deadly instrument which she knew so well how to handle would do its work, and that before the detective could find the new trail.

Shut up in the room from which escape was impossible, Nelly Mascot could do nothing more than wait for the Queen of the League.

A strange silence seemed to fill the whole house.

She went to the door and listened but heard nothing.

Had Judith gone away for a spell?

Perhaps she had another enemy who must be struck before she dealt with her.

What if she knew where to find Silent Sam?

Or mayhap Gogol the boy waif had fallen into her clutches and was awaiting doom elsewhere.

These and a thousand other thoughts filled Nelly's mind. They served to keep her on the alert, and situated as she was with death just beyond the door and liable to enter at any time, she at last resolved to fight the executioner when she came.

Why not fight her? It would be abject cowardice to die like a sheep in the shambles. It would be unworthy of one who had promised to become the bride of the brave man who even then was risking his life to take her from the shadow of the Centipede.

Nelly at last longed for Judith's reappearance.

She wanted to have the fight for life settled one way or another.

She felt her strength increase while she waited. Her decision seemed to arm her with a power she had never known before. She even believed she would win.

While she waited she heard the faint and seemingly far-away tones of a striking clock. It was somewhere in the house and told her that another hour had passed.

As the notes died away there came toward the door a distinct footfall which for a moment drove all her blood to her brain.

This step was preceded by the closing of a door, and Nelly knew that the Shadow was coming on for the last time.

She drew back with gaze riveted upon the door and waited.

There was no weapon in her hand; the den of the Centipede had provided her with nothing defensive; she would have to trust to her bare hands and her called-up strength, and this against the death reptile of the League.

If she had known about Ivan's struggle—if she could have seen that wretch's useless hands—would she have waited for the Centipede with the longing that filled her bosom?

The footstep approached the espied door.

Nelly heard a key thrust into the lock, and the next moment the portal opening revealed the very figure she expected to see—Judith's!

The Queen of the Centipede seemed taken aback by the demeanor of the victim who awaited her in the center of the room.

The eyes of the pair met in mute questioning and defiance.

Judith, shutting the door behind her, looked steadily at Nelly, but did not advance.

The beautiful fly in the web had resolved to resist. She was no longer the unnerved child whom she had taken by force and fascination from Major Mascot's house.

"At last," smiled Judith, "you look like your mother."

Nelly started.

What did that woman, adventuress, plotter, serpent, know of her mother?

"What know you of her?" cried Nelly.

"I like that!" laughed Judith. "You are her living double now—voice, eyes, everything."

The girl in the shadow went forward impulsively.

"You must tell me!" she exclaimed.

"About your mother, child?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, I hated her."

"I can believe that."

"Pagin never told Major Mascot about your ancestry. He left a child with him in New Orleans. That child stands before me. Your mother was beautiful, but she had a mind that could flash. She robbed me."

"Robbed you?" echoed Nelly.

"Yes! Came between me and the first object of a young girl's love."

"Oh!"

"Your mother did that!" continued Judith.

"What became of her?"

"There is a grave in Cuba."

"Her grave!" cried the nabob's ward.

"Her grave."

"Was that before you rose in Russia?" asked Nelly. "Or was it after you fled from the knout of the czar?"

A mad cry broke over Judith's lips.

"Who has talked?" she cried. "Who says that I ever felt the knout?"

"The autograph of his imperial Majesty is even now on your back!" Nelly's hand covered the bloodless face of Judith while she spoke.

"It is there and you know it. Tigress, though in the shadow, as you call it, I am ready for the reptile you carry in your bosom. You must meet me armed as I am. The child of the mother undoubtedly killed by the hand that wields the centipede in Gotham, will avenge the past though she dies in the avenging."

Judith instinctively shrunk toward the door. The hand that moved toward her bosom where nestled the centipede in its delicate box did not get to perform its mission ere Nelly's hands reached her throat and forced her against the wall.

A strange and superhuman strength seemed to have come to the fair girl's rescue; but it was not lasting.

Judith felt the white fingers sink into her throat, and a feeling not to be described came rushing over her.

She threw all her powers into the struggle.

Nelly was borne back and half-way across the room. She felt the new strength leaving her.

The Centipede was about to complete the triumph for which its mistress had plotted so long.

Judith was once more the tigress of the North. "I am done!" passed like a flash through Nelly Mascot's mind. "My strength was not permanent. God pity me! The Centipede has conquered at last!"

With the last thought the struggle ended, and a moment later Judith stood panting over the body of Nelly, unconscious on the floor.

"It could not have ended otherwise!" she murmured. "The Centipede is invincible!"

Judith now took from her bosom the box which contained the reptile fresh from Duval's workshop.

She lifted the wriggling, glittering reptile from its nest and bent over the nabob's ward.

But what kept back her hand?

Was it Nelly's beauty?—the white face beneath the ready sting, or the thought that to slay an unconscious girl would be no victory at all?

Judith sprang up and wheeled about as though a hand had touched her.

The door had opened.

"You? I thought so!" cried the Queen of the League, and then with a hand thrown suddenly above her head she went toward the man who had crossed the threshold.

He saw the reptile whose feelers shook in the light, but the sight did not deter him.

With a bound and a cry he crossed the space between them, and Judith, caught in a flash as her hand descended, was swept back by a power which two like her could not have met successfully.

Silent Sam, who had found the Centipede Queen in the nick of time, tried to shake the reptile from her grip.

"There!" cried Judith at last. "Take the prize you want."

At the same time the centipede was flung away, and, horror! fell upon Nelly's bosom.

The Shadow Sphinx threw the woman across the carpet and sprung to Nelly's rescue. He seized the reptile; it turned in his hand, sting uppermost, but he shook it loose and threw it with all his might against the wall!

The next night the Shadow Sphinx of Gotham received news of the death of a woman in a cell in the City Prison.

In a few moments he was there.

During the day he had looked in vain for Duval and Captain Holofernes. Ivan, too, with his maimed hands, had vanished.

But the dead woman in the cell; what of her?

"We found this in her bosom," said the warden, uncovering a hideous-looking object on his desk for Sam's inspection.

It was the centipede!

"Who saw her to-day?" he asked.

"A boy."

"Gogol?"

"I don't know."

The detective knew that Judith had finished her last plot by destroying herself with the dread reptile, but he could not believe that Gogol had conveyed it to her—his mother.

Still, he began to look for the strange boy, and when he found him in the old quarters he read the truth in his face.

"I found the reptile in Duval's house," said Gogol. "It was ready. I knew she wanted it. Better the centipede than the disgrace of the gallows. For the love of Heaven, Captain Sam, never surrender Gogol's secret!"

The Shadow Sphinx holds it a prisoner to this day.

Captain Holofernes was never found; from the hour of his last interview with Judith, he disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him, and with him perished the secret of Orloff's sudden death, an event recorded in our first chapters.

Duval, the centipede-maker, fled from the scene of his infernal triumphs in mechanics, and, having lost the woman who had fascinated him, returned no more to Gotham.

Released from the shadow the house of Mascot became more prosperous than ever, and Nelly, keeping her promise, became the wife of the persevering and tireless Shadow to whom she owed so much.

A few months ago a man with a pair of scarred and shriveled hands was found dead in the harbor, and the city buried the remains without knowing the secret of the mutilation.

Papa Sinton still lives and frequently visits his son, once Silent Sam the Shadow Sphinx, and Sam and Nelly now and then have Myserie, the wonderful child, for a guest.

As for Gogol, he is growing toward manhood, silent and dejected, with a shadow resting on his life.

THE END.

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- 559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.
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- 579 Old Cormorant, the Bowery Shadow.

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- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.
- 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
- 444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
- 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
- 462 The Circus Detective.
- 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
- 477 Dead-arm Brandt.
- 485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
- 494 The Detective's Spy.
- 501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
- 509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
- 515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
- 536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Matchless Detective's Swell Job.
- 548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
- 561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Invisible Foe.
- 574 Old Falcon's Double.
- 582 Joram, the Detective Expert.

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- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

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